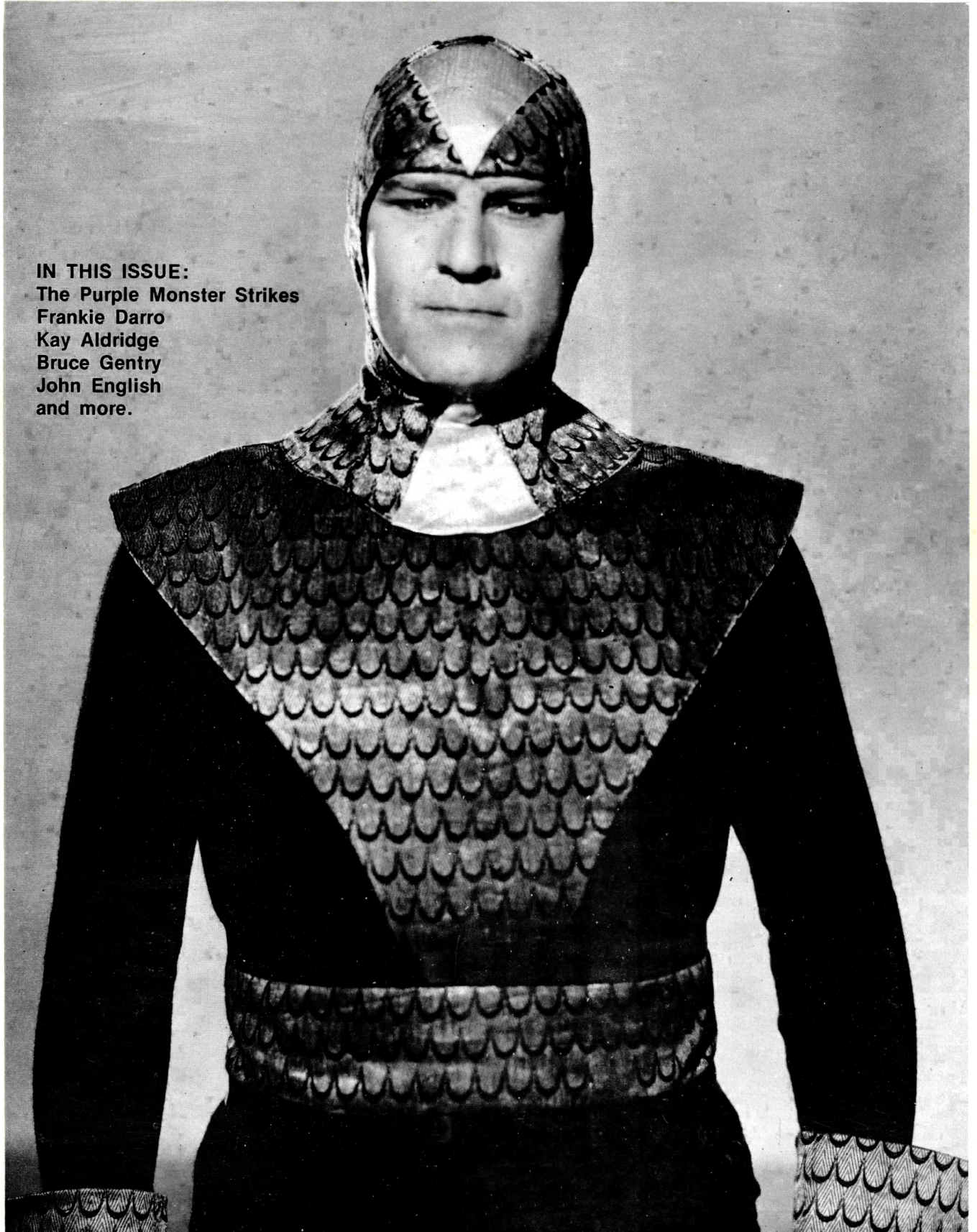


# CLIFFHANGER

IN THIS ISSUE:  
The Purple Monster Strikes  
Frankie Darro  
Kay Aldridge  
Bruce Gentry  
John English  
and more.





**Suck in your breath! Welcome to CLIFFHANGER and the chills and thrills of the movie chapter plays.** Movie serials were special and are enjoying new audiences across the country thanks to PBS series and VCRs. It is our desire to help this new audience as well as older fans who grew up with these chapter plays to relive and better understand this particular art form.

**Cliffhanger** is published quarterly in Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall for \$11.00 for four issues by The World of Yesterday, Route 3, Box 263-H, Waynesville, NC 28786. Phone (704) 648-5647. Application to mail at Controlled Circulation rates is pending at Waynesville, NC. Copyright ©1983 by Linda S. Downey.

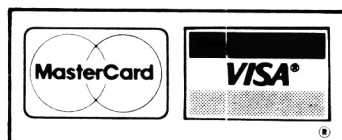
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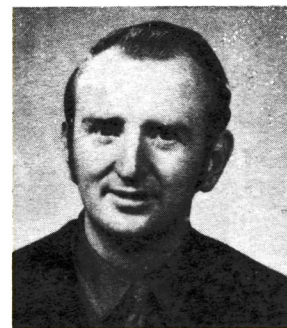
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# THIS 'N' THAT

by Linda and Ron Downey, Editors



March 13, 1983

Salutations and greetings,

Welcome to the newest of the growing family of **World of Yesterday** publications: **Cliffhanger**. We are going to take this space to familiarize those of you who are new to our publications. Our old friends can doze off, go to the next page or read along as they see fit.

First, the **World of Yesterday** is a two person company and their pictures are above. Linda is a RN and works full time. Until recently she had devoted her time completely to the publications but we had two bad spells of sickness last fall and needed some extra money to pay bills. Also we wanted to improve our operation by buying some new equipment, so she is back at work helping our dream of keeping America's entertainment past in the memories of our readers. Ron is the collector in the family and has collected a large library from which we draw on for research. Ron is disabled with a lung problem which has a long name and nobody but doctors have ever heard of: Bronchiectasis. Ron is limited in his activities but what energies he has are devoted to our publications.

Being a two person company means that sometimes things go a little slow. The thing we usually put off to last is answering mail, not orders but questions and other matters. Filling orders is our first priority but sometimes even then it takes a couple of days to fill them.

One question frequently asked is "When does my subscription expire?" Well, if you will take a look at your mailing label you see a number in brackets, that is the number of the last issue of your subscription.

A lot of people write asking questions that would take a lot of research and time to dig out. we are sorry but we cannot undertake these kinds of projects and still do a magazine. The magazines take up almost all our time, spare or otherwise.

Another frequent question is: "Where can I get photos of so and so?" There are many companies but we have dealt with the following three and can recommend them: Jerry

Ohlinger's Movie Materials Store, 120 West Third Street, New York, NY 10012; Eddie Brandt's Saturday Matinee, Box 3232, North Hollywood, CA 91609; and Film Favorites, P.O. Box 133, Canton, OK 73724. The latter deals in reprints.

While this is a two person operation, we are fortunate to have a lot of supporters and friends who help in many ways. Some write articles, some loan photos, some help with research, some donate money, others just help by telling their friends about us. The more subscribers we have the more money we have to make the magazine better. This operation is supposed to be a profit making venture but so far we have plowed every penny right back into it for eight years. We feel like we are just caretakers for the whole family of readers. We encourage you to read page 2, because it has more information you might need.

To Be Continued Next Issue.

God Bless

Ron & Linda

P.S. Thought that line above made a fitting ending for a serial publication.

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## FILM CLUBS THAT SHOW SERIALS AT THEIR MEETINGS

Tennessee Western Film Club, 309 McQueen Street, Elizabethton, TN 37643 meets the second Saturday of every month at the Carter County Rescue Center at 1 p.m. Shows two chapters from a serial every meeting. Current serial is **THE PURPLE MONSTER STRIKES**.

The Wytheville Western Film Club, c/o Craig Allison, 1640 N. Main Street, Wytheville, VA 24382 meets the third Saturday of every month at 10 a.m. during the winter and fall months and at 6 p.m. during the late spring and summer months. They show two chapters of a serial at each meeting. Current serial is **THE BLACK ARROW**.

**We need more listings, is there a club in your area that shows serials on a regular basis? If so, please let us know.**



# THE PURPLE MONSTER STRIKES

A RE-RELEASE

A REPUBLIC SERIAL IN 15 CHAPTERS



**Above:** The one sheet for this serial. **On the Front Cover:** Roy Barcroft as the Purple Monster. (Above courtesy of Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store. On the Front Cover courtesy of Texas Joe Fair.)



# The Purple Monster Strikes

by Paul Dellinger

**Released**.....August, 1945  
**Distributor**.....Republic  
**Copyrighted**.....August 6 & October 11, 1945  
**Length**.....15 Chapters  
**Genre**.....Science-fiction (serial)  
**Directors**.....Spencer Bennet  
and Fred Brannon  
**Associate Producer**.....Ronald Davidson  
**Screenplay**.....Royal Cole,  
Albert DeMond, Basil Dickey,  
Lynn Perkins, Joseph Poland,  
Barney Sarecky and Jesse Duffy (uncredited)  
**Photography**.....Bud Thackery  
**Film Editors**.....Cliff Bell  
and Harold Minter  
**Special Effects**.....Howard and  
Theodore Lydecker  
**Music Director**.....Richard Cherwin

## CAST

Dennis Moore.....Craig Foster  
Linda Stirling.....Shelia Layton  
Roy Barcroft.....The Purple Monster  
James Craven.....Cyrus Layton  
Bud Geary.....Hodge Garrett  
Mary Moore.....Marcia  
John Davidson.....The Emperor of Mars  
Joe Whitehead.....Stewart  
Emmett Vogan.....Saunders  
George Carleton.....Meredith  
Kenne Duncan.....Mitchell  
Rosemonde James.....Helen  
Monte Hale.....Harvey  
Wheaton Chambers.....Benjamin  
Frederick Howard.....Crandall  
Anthony Warde.....Tony  
Ken Terrell.....Martin  
Fred Graham.....Baker, Curry, Fletcher, Logan  
John Daheim.....Barnes  
Tom Steele.....Fritz Benham, Joe, Mears  
Cliff Lyons.....Clay  
Robert Blair.....Evans  
Carey Loftin.....Mack  
Henry Wills.....Mason, Osborne  
Dale Van Sickel.....Policeman  
George Chesebro.....Shaw  
Robert Wilke.....Workman

## Background

Movie serials and science-fiction are old friends. Little spaceships began buzzing through the skies of Universal's first **FLASH GORDON** serial in 1936 and, a year earlier,

Gene Autry had discovered the fantastic underground city of Mascot's **PHANTOM EMPIRE**. Lee Powell and Herman Brix of **LONE RANGER** fame encountered The Lightning--a villain resembling George Lucas' Darth Vader in the **STAR WARS** saga--in **FIGHTING DEVIL DOGS** (1938, Republic), and both Dick Tracy and Batman encountered invisibility in **DICK TRACY VS. CRIME INC.** (1941, Republic) and **BATMAN AND ROBIN** (1949, Columbia).

Robots, ray-guns, anti-gravity belts and inventions with the potential for mass destruction not only threatened the likes of Buck Rogers and Captain Marvel on the serial screen, but more down-to-earth heroes as well. While the special effects may have been primitive by today's standards--Superman's flying and Bruce Gentry's UFOs were all courtesy of Columbia cartoons--the s-f gadgetry was as popular in the heyday of the chapter-play as in today's multi-million dollar features.

With all that, Republic Studios--the biggie among the serial makers--had not dealt with a menace from outer space until 1945 when it released **THE PURPLE MONSTER STRIKES**. Universal, the first studio to plumb the outer depths with serials in **BUCK ROGERS** and its three **FLASH GORDON** serials, would be out of the serial-making business in another year. Shows like **TOM CORBETT**, **SPACE CADET** and **SPACE PATROL** were not only years from appearing on television, but also from being heard on radio. The German V-2 rockets and the atomic bombs that ended World War II had not yet helped create the post-war s-f magazine and book boom that would eventually lift s-f out of pulp magazines with bug-eyed monsters chasing scantily-clad human females on their covers and make such the genre "respectable". Even Columbia's first **SUPERMAN** serial was three years away.

By today's standards, the special effects in **PURPLE MONSTER** might seem crude--but not by those of 1945, when s-f was perceived as barely above a comic book level of entertainment. For its time, **PURPLE MONSTER** managed to pull off a few coups (the scene of the spaceship arriving in chapter one, the inhabiting and re-animation of a dead human body in every chapter). It also formed the basis of practically all the s-f serials that followed it, at least at Republic.

For the title character, Republic used its favorite B-western heavy--Roy Barcroft--and gave him what he later termed one of his favorite roles. His favorite, he said, was as Captain



# THE PURPLE MONSTER STRIKES



The Lobby Card showing Roy Barcroft trying to stab Dennis Moore and Roy welcoming Mary Moore to Earth. (Courtesy of Texas Joe Fair.)

Memphisto in **MANHUNT OF MYSTERY ISLAND** (Republic) the same year. The two had similarities. In **MANHUNT**, the unknown villain would enter a transformation chamber and emerge as the supposedly long-dead pirate played by Barcroft. In **MONSTER**, Barcroft would slip from his man-from-Mars identity to and from that of a human scientist. (Linda Stirling played the female lead in both serials and, in an early blow for women's lib, even pulled the trigger that finished off Memphisto in **MANHUNT**.)

With a few rare exceptions like **THINGS TO COME** (1936), serials had s-f elements all to themselves. The turning point would come in 1950 with George Pal's scientifically-plausible **DESTINATION: MOON** followed by such features as **WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE** and **WAR OF THE WORLDS**. Other studios responded with films like **THE THING**, **THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN**, **INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS**, **THIS ISLAND EARTH**, **20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA**, **FORBIDDEN PLANET** and others showing that s-f did have a

life beyond the serial screen.

It was not until 1950 that Mars launched another serial invasion. By now, flying saucers had become the rage and Republic issued **FLYING DISC MAN FROM MARS** in which Gregory Gay portrayed a Martian named Mota (spell it backwards) who wore Barcroft's Purple Monster costume and enlisted the aid of a renegade Earth scientist played by James Craven (Craven had not been so willing an accomplice for the Martians in **PURPLE MONSTER**, when Barcroft killed him and inhabited his body through the rest of the serial, off and on, but using him again in **FLYING DISC MAN** must have given viewers with memories spanning five years a sense of déjà vu). Barcroft was back in 1952 as the leader of **RADAR MEN FROM THE MOON**, to match last-chapter footage lifted from the final chapter of **PURPLE MONSTER**. The same year, Republic issued **ZOMBIES OF THE STRATOSPHERE** featuring Martians again. This time they planned to knock Earth from its orbit with atomic charges, and were played by Lane





Roy Barcroft as the Purple Monster on the neutral background used to make the special exposure used in the shot where he enters and leaves Layton's body. (Courtesy of Texas Joe Fair.)

Bradford and a youthful Leonard Nimoy. As Narab, Nimoy has a last-chapter change of heart and tells hero Judd Holdren where the bomb is planted. It has been said that perhaps Nimoy wanted to make sure Earth was still here when STAR TREK time arrived so he could play Mr. Spock. (Both 1952 serials also lifted lots of footage from Republic's 1949 **KING OF THE ROCKET MEN**, in which Tris Coffin donned a helmet and rocket jacket to zoom through the sky like Captain Marvel.)

The only other post-**PURPLE MONSTER** serials featuring humanoids from other worlds came from Columbia--**CAPTAIN VIDEO** (1951) and **THE LOST PLANET** (1953), both starring Judd Holdren, and **MYSTERIOUS ISLAND** (1951), in which Karen Randle play a woman from the planet Mercury who is added to the Jules Verne story and is intent upon gathering enough of a certain mineral to blow up Earth.

Unlike serials of similar theme that would follow, **PURPLE MONSTER** showed no rocket men, rocketships, starry skies or pseudo-scienc-

tific gadgetry behind its opening credits. Instead, it had a representation of the Purple Monster standing with his back to us in the lower left corner of the screen, holding what looked like a knife--rather an unsophisticated weapon for a man from Mars--and casting a long menacing shadow across to the upper right portion of the screen. That's all there was, the figure and its shadow against a featureless gray background, but it seemed effective enough.

## Chapter One THE MAN IN THE METEOR

As the story opens, we see what appears to be a meteor blazing a path across the starry heavens. A narrator (who sounds like Tris Coffin) tells us it is indeed a strange object hurtling through interstellar space toward Earth and is now just beyond the stratosphere (since the object is from Mars rather than another star, it is hurtling through interplanetary rather





James Craven, Dennis Moore and Linda Stirling in a scene from the first chapter. (Courtesy of Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store.)

than interstellar space--and the narrator mispronounces "stratosphere," using a long "a," but it still made for an intriguing opener).

Our perspective switches to the observatory of Dr. Cyrus Layton (James Craven), who is tracking the object and gets on the telephone to his niece, Sheila (Linda Stirling). She is about to go out to dinner, she says, with Craig Foster, an attorney for the Scientific Research Foundation. Excitedly, Layton tells her the purple-colored meteor he is watching seems destined to land nearby and urges her to bring Craig to his observatory-home when Craig arrives to pick her up.

But the "meteor" arrives first, and Layton drives to what he estimates will be its point of impact. Sure enough, it crashes and dislodges an egg-shaped compartment which splits open to reveal a man in a strange costume--a skin-tight black coverall including gloves, with a headpiece revealing only the face and extending to the edges of the shoulders and down to from a "V" on the chest. Like its matching wrist and ankle cuffs and belt, it

seems to be made up of a great number of tiny gills. The figure leaps from the compartment shell and dashes away just before it bursts into flame and burns to ashes, leaving no trace. (It may be worth noting that the invading Martians from H.G. Wells' much-imitated novel of 1898, **War of the Worlds**, a Mercury Theater radio version of which frightened so many listeners who thought it was real in 1938. The infant **Superman** had arrived from the late planet Krypton much the same way in the comic book, published in 1938, and Kirk Alyn would do so again in Columbia's 1948 serial version. But it must have been a long and uncomfortable flight for this Martian, curled up as he was for perhaps 38 million miles of flight.)

Layton approaches the strange figure, and is surprised to learn it speaks English. The visitor (Roy Barcroft) informs Layton that he speaks all languages--that he has been using a device called the distance eliminator to tune in on Earth and, through it, he has learned of Layton's work on a jet plane which can soar





Roy Barcroft gets ready to bean Dennis Moore who has Bud Geary at a disadvantage in this scene from Chapter One. (Courtesy of Film Favorites.)

into space (it was called a jet plane rather than a rocket ship, which it really was, to avoid any possible legal objection from Universal Studio which had used rocket ships in its **FLASH GORDON/BUCK ROGERS** serials).

The visitor accompanies Layton back to the scientist's study, revealing that his interest in Layton's work stems from the fact that Mars has only been able so far to build one-way spacecraft and is interested in Layton's plans for a jet plane capable of a round trip. Believing he is about to play a role in opening commerce between civilizations on two worlds, Layton proclaims this the proudest day of his life. "Unfortunately," his visitor replies, "it is also the last day of your life."

The only thing that has kept Mars from invading Earth has been the lack of a space vehicle which can return to its home planet, the man from Mars informs Layton coldly and dispassionately. He lays he will perfect Layton's jet plane and return in it to Mars where a fleet can be built.

"Then you landed in the wrong country, my

friend," says a surprisingly-unfrightened Layton. "Do you think the American people will sit by and do nothing while you build a jet plane for the purpose of bringing in an army of conquest?"

"Yes, because they won't know I'm building it. I intend to build it in the personality of Dr. Cyrus Layton. You see, I have the ability to kill you, enter your body and use it for my own purposes." The visitor produces a burr-like ball, holding it between thumb and finger. "This capsule contains a specimen of the atmosphere surrounding Mars, a highly concentrated form of carbo-oxide gas. It's harmless for me to breathe, of course, but it will be instantly fatal to you."

The creature smashes the capsule, releasing some white fumes which cause Layton to fall dead. The Martian props the body in a chair--but before he can do more, there is a knock at the door. Sheila and Craig (Dennis Moore) have arrived, and become alarmed when there is no answer.

Craig manages to break in, but is felled





Joe Whitehead explains the time lock to Dennis Moore in this scene from Chapter Two. (Courtesy of Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store.)

from behind by the Martian. The creature then takes a position by the far wall, breaks another capsule and, as it vaporizes, seems to become transparent. He walks to where Layton is seated, and eases himself into the same chair, seeming to vanish into Layton's form--which then awakens! (This footage or its reverse would be used throughout the serial.)

Craig also comes around, and Layton--or the creature who now inhabits Layton's body--tells Craig and Sheila that someone calling himself the Purple Monster had attacked and left him dazed. Craig theorizes that this must be who knocked him out, too, and probably fled through glass doors providing a way out of the study. He suggests it might be the same man who sent Layton an anonymous message threatening bodily harm unless Layton paid up \$50,000. Assured by the pseudo-Layton that he is all right, Craig and Sheila leave.

No sooner are they gone than an armed hoodlum named Garrett (Bud Geary) appears, saying it was he who sent that message and, not having gotten the cash, he is here to

punish Layton. Layton's response is to return to his chair, seem to become unconscious, and remain there as an ethereal form rises and walks to one side. The form breaks what appears to be a capsule, then seems to solidify into--the Purple Monster. The monster approaches Garrett, who has dropped his pistol in terror.

The monster tells Garrett he might be able to use someone with criminal talents, and Garrett enlists eagerly. "You have chosen wisely," the monster says. "I assure you that the alternative would have been most unpleasant."

Their first task is to steal a rocket, being developed by Charles Mitchell (Kenne Duncan) to propel Layton's jet plane into the stratosphere (this time they pronounce it correctly). Although he is captured by the two, Mitchell manages to tap out an SOS in morse code on the phone when Craig calls. Alerted, Craig and Sheila rush to Mitchell's workshop and encounter Garrett and the Purple Monster.

Sheila joins in the fray enthusiastically but ineffectively. She leaps on Garrett's back, and





Dennis Moore is again choking Bud Geary in this scene from Chapter Two. (Courtesy of Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store.)

is knocked down. Recovering, she charges across the room at Garrett and is heaved into the open compartment of the phototype rocket behind him, where she lies unconscious. Craig, meanwhile, is more than holding his own against both Garrett and the Purple Monster. Although physically smaller than either of them, he lays both of them out in the fight (something he would continue to do throughout the serial; Dennis Moore, or his double, is a better fighter in this screenplay than he would be in any of his other appearances at practically every studio in business at the time during his career--a marked contrast to Richard Bailey in **MANHUNT OF MYSTERY ISLAND** who seldom managed to do more than fight his opponent to a draw).

However, during the melee, someone stumbles against the switch activating the rocket's launching sequence. As the fight continues, the rocker builds up to launch power. Craig rushes toward it, and we see him standing by a pile of boxes beside it just as it lifts off its ramp, crashes through a

window and explodes just outside the building.

## Chapter Two THE TIME TRAP

What we didn't see is that Craig not only had time to pick up his revolver, pocket it, lift Sheila from the rocket and place her out of sight behind the crates before the rocket shot out through the window and blew up. In the confusion following the explosion, Garrett and the Purple Monster slip away.

Back at Layton's study, the Purple Monster returns to his guise as the Earth scientist. Accompanied by Garrett, he sets up a distance eliminator to communicate with his home planet in the workshop-basement of the observatory.

He contacts the Emperor of Mars (John Davidson) on a television screen. The emperor, decked out in a high-collared robe and jeweled cap-like headpiece, congratulates the Purple Monster on achieving the Layton form and assures him: "If you need any help, it will be





Dennis Moore has the drop on Roy Barcroft in this scene from Chapter Four. (Courtesy of Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store.)

sent. Mars and your emperor are proud of you."

The next piece of scientific data sought by the Purple Monster is locked in a vault in an upper story of a tall building, and protected by a time lock which keeps the vault from being opened until morning. As Layton, the Purple Monster is able to visit the place and leave a device which speeds up the clock governing the time lock, so it can be opened with Garrett's earthly safecracking talents that night. But Craig also visits the place, and notices that the clock is moving faster than it should. Rather than stopping it, he allows it to continue but hides in the hallway outside.

The Purple Monster enters by another route--by shoving a ladder with hooks on one end across from a window on the same level in a nearby building. He walks calmly across it, despite the dizzying height; Garrett, in a more human reaction, immediately drops to his hands and knees to scuttle across.

Craig hears them from the hallway, and enters to catch them in the act of the

theft--but, as usual, his pistol is knocked away and a fight breaks out. Fleeing from Craig's effective fists, the Purple Monster does his tightrope act back across but the crawling Garrett is tackled by Craig as the fight continues, many stories up. Garrett eventually makes it through the window and, with the Purple Monster, pushes on the ladder as Craig hangs onto it. The hooks on the far end bounce a few times as Craig and the rest of the ladder swing free of the other building. Before Craig can climb up to the window where the vault is, the hooks slip off and the ladder plunges down with him on it.

### Chapter Three FLAMING AVALANCHE

As the ladder plummets down, the hooks at its top catch on a cable crossing the face of the building and Craig reaches a window.

Since Layton had made up the story that the Purple Monster stole plans for his jet plane, Craig anticipates that the monster will seek



# THE PURPLE MONSTER STRIKES



The Lobby Card for Chapter Five is the same as Chapter One except for the Chapter title. Compare these cards with the ones from **BRUCE GENTRY**. (Courtesy of Film Favorites.)

rocket fuel. A call to Saunders (Emmett Vogan), at a fuel storage depot confirms that somebody is in the process of buying and loading some at the moment. Craig tells Saunders to delay the buyer until he gets there--then is attacked by the Purple Monster in Layton's study. The monster tries to stab Craig but misses, and barely manages to escape and re-enter Layton's body. In that guise, he calls Saunders and talks to the buyer who turns out to be Garrett. "Grab that fuel and get out of there, no matter what you have to do," he orders.

Garrett hangs up and says he is leaving with what fuel is already loaded. "But I haven't finished making out the receipt," Saunders protests. Garrett floors him with one punch: "There's your receipt."

He and his driver (Fred Graham) pull off in their truck just as Craig and Sheila drive up, and pursue them. Craig fires as he drives after the truck, and hits the fuel tank a couple times causing fuel to spray out on the highway. Its slickness nearly causes their car to spin out, but Craig regains control and continues the

chase. Garrett, realizing he is losing fuel and can't outrun the car, tells his driver to stop at the top of a hill. He gets out, sets fire to the remaining fuel, and yells for the driver to let the truck roll back--which it does, right into the path of Craig's and Sheila's car. The two vehicles meet halfway down the incline, and both are wiped out in the explosion.

## Chapter Four THE LETHAL PIT

Seeing the back of the fiery truck rolling toward them, Craig turns to Sheila and says, "Jump!" They bail out from opposite sides of the car, which continues on into the truck. (The technicians which control such explosions made an infinitesimal miscalculation this time, and the car and truck can be seen blowing up a fraction of a second before they come together.)

Craig reports back to Saunders that the thieves didn't get away with the fuel, but now will probably try to steal Saunders' secret





Bud Geary and Roy Barcroft tie up Linda Stirling in this scene from Chapter Seven. (Courtesy of Film Favorites.)

formula for it instead. He suggests that Saunders write out a false formula, naming a key ingredient available only at one plant. This will allow Craig to trace whoever steals the formula and tries to make the fuel.

The Purple Monster tries to get the formula from Saunders during an afternoon call by the respectable Dr. Layton. "No, Doctor," Saunders responds affably. "That formula's better off in my safe than in your head." Layton is agreeable but sends Saunders off on some other errand, giving him time to get the formula from the safe--except that Saunders returns and catches him at it. Pulling a pistol, Layton tells Saunders who he really is, then kills him with one of the Martian gas pellets used earlier on Layton: "This pellet contains a quantity of Martian gas--harmless to me but fatal to you."

Learning of Saunders' death, Craig assumes the Purple Monster has the false formula and will be seeking the key ingredient--which Garrett and another henchman, Ed Fletcher (Graham, again) are doing at that moment.

They are beating a workman named Shaw (George Chesebro) to learn the whereabouts of a storage depot for the ingredient. Shaw stubbornly refuses to talk until Garrett has Fletcher hold his arm on a table and lets acid, poured from a crock, run slowly toward it. Shaw breaks, and reveals the information, and is then knocked out.

Craig then arrives on the scene and, with his usual brand of fisticuffs, knocks out both Garrett and Fletcher when they disarm him by kicking a stool at his pistol. Before Craig can follow up his advantage, though, the Purple Monster arrives and begins shooting at him. Scooping up his own pistol, Craig slides down what looks like a fireman's pole into a mixing vat where he returns the fire of his three assailants, killing Fletcher. The Purple Monster keeps Craig pinned down while Garrett runs a large quantity of deadly acid into the vat where Craig is trapped.

## Chapter Five DEATH ON THE BEAM





Roy Barcroft captures Linda Stirling in the Last Chapter. (Courtesy of Film Favorites.)

Shaw regains consciousness before Craig is hurt by the acid. He picks up Fletcher's pistol and joins in the fight, driving Garrett and the Purple Monster away, and turns off the acid in time to save Craig from its fumes.

The Purple Monster has gotten hold of one of the pieces of equipment he wants for his rocket--an electro-annihilator, to be used for destroying meteors in space. As Layton, he attends a demonstration of it so Garrett and another henchman (Tom Steele) can get inside to hijack it. They get the drop on Craig and the rest of the party and are about to tie him up when Craig breaks loose. Garrett flees in the truck containing the electro-annihilator, crashing the vehicle through a door. The henchman strikes Craig with a thrown object and manages to get to his pistol, but Craig fires first and kills him.

The electro-annihilator is used to blow up vehicles along a stretch of highway, and its use is recognized by Craig. Using another device to detect the killer beam, he drives through the danger area with Sheila, in radio contact, following in a second car. The

beam-finder registers danger and Craig is forced to leap from his car before he can tell Sheila what's happening. Unknown to her, it blows up on the road ahead of her.

Craig tracks the beam to its source, and finds Garrett and another man now tracking Sheila's car to blow it up. It turns out that the Purple Monster, as Layton, again warned Garrett of Craig's plans by radio. (The destructive machine, as it warms up, emits the same sounds as The Ghost's invisibility device in **DICK TRACY VS. CRIME INC.** and Dr. Vulcan's sonic decimator in **KING OF THE ROCKETMEN.**)

"Turn off that machine!" Craig orders Garrett, but the other man jumps him and they fight as Sheila, still trying to contact Craig by radio, continues into the path of the beam. Her call is picked up on the radio at the site of the device and, before Craig can do anything about the machine, Sheila's car explodes.

## Chapter Six THE DEMON KILLER



Craig knocks out both his opponents and gets on their radio to Sheila: "Sheila--jump! The annihilator beam is focused on you!" Sheila leaps out of her car before it blows up. But while Craig is doing that, Garrett gets into the truck with the annihilator and escapes, leaving his henchman to shoot it out with Craig--and lose.

As Layton, the Purple Monster tells Garrett they can't use the annihilator while Craig has the beam-finder. The finder has been damaged in the fight and its inventor, Dr. Crandall (Frederick Howard), is supposed to repair it. "Crandall isn't going to live long enough to repair that finder," says Layton.

Appearing as himself, the Purple Monster leads Craig on a wild goose chase while Garrett, hiding in Layton's house, locks Sheila in a closet at gunpoint and sets a trap in the finder. Later, the Purple Monster tells Garrett the needle he put in the finder will inject Crandall with a drug which will turn him into a madman before it kills him.

Layton pretends to have chased Garrett after Sheila was imprisoned, and recovered the finder when Garrett dropped it. He turns the deadly finder over to Craig for Crandall to fix, and Crandall--stuck by the deadly needle inside--does go mad.

When Craig and Sheila arrive to pick up the finder, the deranged Crandall becomes progressively argumentative with them and finally opens a trapdoor in the floor. Sheila drops through but Craig grabs onto the side, and climbs out as Crandall spins a wheel on the wall that floods the chamber below the trapdoor with water. As Craig struggles with him to cut it off, Crandall collapses and dies--but, by then, Garrett has arrived to take up the fight as Sheila, trapped under the now-closed trapdoor, disappears under the water.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **THE EVIL EYE**

Craig knocks out Garrett and turns off the water. He opens the trapdoor and pulls Sheila to safety, but not in time to stop Garrett from fleeing when he comes to.

Learning that Saunders died from an overdose of a drug called kirava, Sheila (wearing the same dress and vest in which she nearly drowned; in fact, she wears the same outfit throughout the serial and, considering what she goes through, it must be made of the world's most durable material) visits a blind man named Tony (Anthony Warde) who uses the drug to find out who prescribes it. Tony's blindness, however, is fake. He works for Garrett, and radios him about the false address

to which he sent Sheila.

A henchman (Graham) demonstrates an electric eye to the Purple Monster and Garrett. "Excellent. This should prove invaluable to me," the Purple Monster says. Sheila arrives to be greeted by Garrett's revolver, and pulled inside where she gasps: "The Purple Monster! I should have suspected this was a trap."

"You can't know everything, lady," Garrett tells her.

Craig, meanwhile, questions Tony who denies ever having talked to Sheila. As he leaves, Craig drops a coin into Tony's cup and pretends to drop a dollar bill--which Tony picks up as Craig watches from a distance. With a policeman (Dale Van Sickel), he returns and catches Tony talking by radio to Garrett. They force him to reveal the address where Garrett is hiding.

Knowing Craig is on his way, the Purple Monster leaves Sheila tied and gagged in a room guarded by the electric eye. When someone steps through the door, the eye beam will be broken and an explosive will be set off. "I've spent months building this machine and now you want me to blow it up," the henchman, but the monster assures him it will be worth it before he exits.

Craig arrives before Garrett and the henchman escape, however, and another fight breaks out. Craig decks the henchman and, as Garrett drives off, enters the room where Sheila is bound. The entire house goes up in a massive explosion.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **DESCENDING DOOM**

But it doesn't happen quite that way in the next chapter. This time, before Craig enters the room, Sheila gets her gag off and warns him of the electric eye beam. Gripping the top of the door sill, Craig swings himself over it and frees her. They exit by another door. Behind them, the henchman comes to and fires a gun at them. Craig fires back, hitting the henchman who falls through the door and sets off the explosive, a safe distance from Craig and Sheila.

Craig urges Layton to come to police headquarters and see if he can identify Tony as one of Garrett's men. Afraid Tony will talk if he does, Layton arranges for Garrett to fake a kidnapping to delay things until they can arrange through a man named Fritz Benham (Tom Steele) to get Tony out of the way. As Sheila drives her "uncle" to headquarters, Garrett forces them off the road and leaves with him.

"You did a very convincing job," Layton



compliments Garrett as they drive off, leaving Sheila with a flat tire.

"I should. I've had plenty of practice," the crook replies.

Sheila finally makes it to headquarters and learns that Tony has been poisoned and Benham is suspected, but doesn't know it. Craig follows Benham, hoping he will lead the way to where Sheila's uncle is being held, which he does. Craig knocks him out before he enters the building, then lets himself in through a window. Catching Layton's eye, Craig signals for silence. Layton nods, but manages to whisper to Garrett that Craig has just climbed in the window. Garrett ambles over ostensibly to close the window, and gets the drop on Craig crouched behind a table.

Craig manages to knock him backwards, then rolls under the table and strikes one of the two henchmen in the room. One of the three criminals is shot by mistake by a comrade. Another attacks Craig with a sledgehammer and Craig shoots him, leaving only Garrett. As they fight, Layton loosens a massive machine overhanging the room. This time, Garrett manages to knock out Craig and, as Craig lies beneath it, Layton lets the machine fall toward him.

### **Chapter Nine THE LIVING DEAD**

Craig recovers in time to roll aside, but Garrett flees allowing Craig to complete his "Rescue" of Layton.

Trying to anticipate the Purple Monster's next move, Craig telephones Paul Meredith (George Carleton), who has developed an oxygen device for use in space, to warn him of possible trouble only to learn he is already supposedly invited Meredith to a luncheon meeting. Craig and Meredith switch places, in case the invitation was a trap.

Meredith is with Sheila when they walk in on her uncle in his study, only to find him comatose (the Purple Monster has left his earthly body to go after Meredith as himself). At Meredith's, the Purple Monster enters through a window only to find himself facing Craig's revolver.

"So the Purple Monster has finally made a mistake," Craig says. He is interrupted by a phone call from Sheila, who tells of finding her uncle apparently near death. It gives the Purple Monster a chance to fire an electronic torch which narrowly misses Craig. In the fight, the Monster upsets a table on Craig and flees. He radios Garrett that Sheila told Craig she was taking her uncle's body to a hospital and orders Garrett to stop her.

In separate cars, Garrett and the Purple Monster trap the ambulance and stop it. Garrett takes Layton's body to one of the cars, while the Purple Monster covers Sheila and the ambulance driver who is still behind the wheel. Suddenly Sheila turns and grapples with the Purple Monster, telling the driver to "Go on!" He does, but Garrett fires and hits him.

Craig drives to the scene, not knowing of the runaway ambulance hurtling towards him. Suddenly it appears, strikes his car and carries it off the road and over a cliff.

### **Chapter Ten HOUSE OF HORROR**

Craig jumps clear and continues on foot to where Sheila has been knocked to the ground. The Purple Monster is aiming a revolver at her. Craig fires first, knocking the gun from the Monster's hand. The Monster and Garrett drive off with Layton's body.

Back at the observatory, the Purple Monster re-inhabits Layton's body. When Craig and Sheila arrive, they find Layton pretending to telephone for aid. He claims to have recovered consciousness, jumped from his captors' car and wandered back home in a daze.

When Craig and Sheila leave, the Layton figure communicates again with the Emperor of Mars, saying he has encountered obstacles in his mission to Earth. "Obstacles?" scoffs the Emperor. "What obstacles could possibly stop you, the second highest on Mars?" The Monster provides a complete report, which makes this the serial's review chapter, recounting the initial encounter with Layton and takeover of his dead body, the first chapter cliffhanger, the attempt to steal rocket fuel and the truck exploding in a collision with Craig's car (the third chapter cliffhanger), until finally the Emperor says the Purple Monster should concentrate on eliminating Craig Foster.

"Your command is my law," the monster says. Garrett then discloses that he has a place in the city that he uses to get rid of people by telephone. If the Monster can get Foster in there, Garrett boasts, he will never leave.

Layton manages to do that by pretending to remember the address from his captivity. Craig gets inside and begins searching the place. Checking his watch, Layton phones the apartment. Craig goes to where a wall phone is located in an alcove and picks it up, activating a device which drops bars at the front of the alcove, trapping him--and then the wall begins to move toward the bars, threatening to squash Craig or impale him on spikes jutting from the bars.



## Chapter Eleven MENACE OF MARS

Thinking fast, Craig braces his pistol against the mouthpiece of the wall phone and one of the spikes on the bars. The wall continues pushing, forcing the bars to fall out and free Craig.

Craig had found the name of Benjamin in the apartment, and connects it with the inventor of the atmospheric stabilizer--another device to be used in space travel. Sure enough, Benjamin (Wheaton Chambers) is the Purple Monster's next target, but there is a problem: Benjamin carries the information on his device in his head instead of writing it down. "I've made men talk before," Garrett boasts. But the Monster decides more subtle means are needed, and contacts his Emperor via the distance eliminator one more time. He asks the Emperor to send another Martian--his assistant, Marcia--to Earth.

In a projectile like that shown in the first chapter, Marcia (Mary Moore) arrives and leaps from her capsule before it burns. She is dressed similarly to the Purple Monster, although her costume is more feminine--the leg tights are more sheer, and she has an added golden-looking belt with ornaments on it. She is met by the Purple Monster and Garrett, and receives her instructions about Benjamin.

While Benjamin and Craig are having lunch, Marcia walks in on Helen (Rosemonde James), Benjamin's trusted assistant, and kills her with one of the Martian gas pellets. She re-inhabits Helen's body before Benjamin and Craig, who heard Helen scream, can break into the laboratory. By then, Marcia has taken Helen's form over completely, and explains that she touched something electric and experienced a shock.

She locates the data on Benjamin's device, but Benjamin walks in unexpectedly. He sends her away and phones Craig, apparently aware of what his assistant is doing, but she listens and shoots Benjamin before he can reveal her spying. She calls for assistance, which comes in the form of Garrett and a henchman (Graham).

Craig arrives shortly afterward and gets the drop on them. To distract him, Helen/Marcia points to Benjamin's body: "He moved!" Craig looks, and the two men jump him. The henchman swings at Craig and, missing, staggers into a disintegration chamber within the lab. Garrett hurls a chair at Craig, who also staggers toward the chamber from the impact, and another shower of sparks erupts.

## Chapter Twelve

## PERILOUS PLUNGE

But it is only the chair, and not Craig, that goes into the chamber and disintegrates. Craig then knocks out Garrett, and instructs Helen to phone Layton and tell him what happened. The bogus Helen gladly complies, and receives instructions from the fake Layton to cut Garrett's bonds somehow before Craig takes him away. She manages to do so with a pair of scissors, and Garrett pretends to volunteer to take Craig to the Purple Monster's hideaway.

Craig walks into a room with Garrett, to find the Purple Monster seated in front of him. Their entrance does not shake him up at all. "You're here because I want you here," he says.

"If I didn't want you on trial, I'd call your bluff," says Craig.

"Then I'll call yours," the Monster says, "and, with a mere gesture of my hand, send you into eternity." The gesture signals a hidden rifleman to shoot, but Craig sees him and shoots first. "This time," he tells the Purple Monster, covering him again, "put both your hands up."

But Garrett, suddenly free of his bonds, jumps Craig who must fight both him and the Purple Monster. He does so adequately, forcing them to flee. Examining Garrett's ropes, he finds they had been partly cut. He phones Sheila at Benjamin's and tells her that.

Sheila finds strands of rope on the scissors, and connects them with Helen. She tries to keep Helen from leaving, but the Martian-inhabited assistant attacks her and knocks her out. She recovers sufficiently to observe the transformation as Marcia emerges from Helen's body, and goes to a car. Pulling herself to her feet, Sheila gets into another car and chases her. The chase ends at a dead-end road high above a cliff.

Sheila catches up with the fleeing Marcia at the cliff's edge. They struggle, and both women tumble over the side.

## Chapter Thirteen FIERY SHROUD

Sheila lands on a ledge just below the cliff's edge, but Marcia plunges on past to her death.

Later, Sheila tells her "uncle" of seeing a strange-looking medallion ripped from the belt of the strange girl, and that it might be a clue as to who she was. She and Craig plan to search for it, she says. Layton contacts Garrett, telling him the medallion is made of metallarium which is found on Mars and could provide Craig and Sheila with a vital clue if they recover and analyze it.



Garrett and a henchman (Tom Steele) try to find it first and, encountering Craig, engage him in a gunfight. Craig chases Garrett as the henchman, with the medallion, circles back to where Sheila waits near their car. She hides the keys, claiming not to have them. The gunman threatens to shoot her, and is about to pull the trigger when he is shot by Craig who had lost Garrett among the rocks and returned. Craig decides Garrett probably fled with the medallion, but Sheila suggests that the other man might have had it--and he did.

Craig takes it to metallurgist Harvey (Monte Hale) for analysis, and waits in the outer office while Harvey works and an assistant rolls in a rail car to be filled with molten metal periodically. Garrett slips in and demands the medallion from Harvey. "Do you have any authority for such a request?" asks Harvey.

"Yeah, this," says Garrett, drawing his pistol. "Now hand it over." But Craig has overheard and come up behind Garrett by then, covering him and taking his pistol. Once he has Garrett's revolver, he reveals that his own was empty from their earlier gunfight.

But the advantage is short-lived. When the rail car rolls in again, the Purple Monster is in it and gets the drop on Craig. It is temporary, as usual, Harvey throws something at the Monster and Craig finds himself fighting the pair once more after Harvey is knocked out. The Purple Monster knocks Craig into the car and, as Craig slumps unconscious, runs it under the spout where the molten metal fills it to the brim.

## **Chapter Fourteen**

### **THE FATAL TRIAL**

(The title was supposed to be "The Fatal Trail" but two letters became transposed, according to Jack Mathis' **Valley of the Cliffhangers**.)

Craig comes to in time to jump out of the rail car before the molten metal pours into it. Harvey also recovers and, picking up a discarded pistol, blazes away at the intruders until they flee.

Analysis of the medallion does indeed point to an extraterrestrial origin, and the possibility that Martians on Earth would need a supply of the carbo-oxide gas found on their home planet. Sheila locates the one place such gas could be manufactured and acquired, and Craig finds Garrett and another man leaving with a truckload of gas containers. He climbs aboard one of the two trailers it is pulling as it drives off.

During the trip, Garrett notices that one of the containers is loose but tells his driver to

keep going while he climbs back to secure it. He runs into Craig and, in the fight, knocks him off between the two trailers, then returns to the cab believing Craig is finished.

But Craig lay flat as the second trailer passed over him, then grabbed the back of it and climbed aboard as the truck continued on. (It was a throwaway stunt here, but a major segment of the recent serial-type movie, **RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK**.) He hangs on until it reaches its destination, then tries to capture the men in the building. The result is a fight, and an unintentional releasing of a switch which will cause the gas stored there to explode in a matter of seconds. Garrett notices the dial in the danger zone first, runs out to a truck and drives away. Craig continues fighting his henchman, as the building goes up in an enormous blast.

## **Last Chapter**

### **TAKEOFF TO DESTRUCTION**

But Craig has knocked out the last of his opposition, and run outside, firing at the fleeing Garrett, before the explosion. He is unhurt. Before he revealed himself inside, he had listened to the number of telephone clicks as Garrett called his master and now, as he checks them to determine what number was called, he finds it was that of Sheila's uncle.

Conferring with Sheila, he reminds her what she saw the female creature do in connection with Helen's body, and suggests that Dr. Layton might be similarly animated by the Purple Monster. To find out, Sheila keeps Layton out of his study long enough for Craig to plant a telephone-activated movie camera. Slipping out through the glass doors barely in time to escape being seen by the returning Layton, he rejoins Sheila to make the call which would trick the Purple Monster--if he is Layton--into resuming his true guise.

"A great deal is going to depend on this phone call," he says, dialing Layton and telling him the Purple Monster has been spotted hiding at the observatory and police are on their way. The call does indeed prompt the Purple Monster to leaving Layton's body and going to his secret workshop beneath the observatory, where his rocket is all but ready to blast off. Sheila, returning to the observatory, stumbles onto the underground entrance and is captured by the Purple Monster. Moments later, Craig finds it, too. As the Monster's men are activating the annihilator for defense, he fights Garrett and the others but is unable to keep the Purple Monster from getting up a ladder and into the ship, which blasts off in a series of sparks and flame.





Frankie Darro is a hardboiled jockey who meets his match in Gene Autry in Columbia's **SONS OF NEW MEXICO** (1950). (Courtesy of Charles K. Stumpf.)



Having flattened all other opposition, Craig starts to untie Sheila and she tells him the annihilator is warmed up. Craig wheels its ray in the direction in which the rocket has just departed. Inside the rocket, the Purple Monster leans back at the controls, confident of his escape now with the prototype of the round-trip rockets which will soon be launched against Earth. The ray catches up with the rocket, and

it explodes.

A viewing of the film from the hidden camera discloses that Layton's body had housed the Purple Monster. Craig, Sheila and an official view it, and express a great deal of relief that an entire planet of such monsters no longer threaten an invasion of Earth.

THE END

-PD

## Little Guy with a Big Grin: **FRANKIE DARRO**

by Charles K. Stumpf

The pini-sized actor with the winning grin was born Frank Johnson in Chicago, Illinois on December 22, 1917. His parents did an aerialist act with the Sells Brothers Circus, and young Frankie accompanied them on their travels across the country. Settling in California, his father went to work as a stunt man in films, often taking young Frankie to the movie lots with him. It wasn't long before someone noticed the boy's potential as an actor.

Frankie began his movie career at the age of six appearing with Wallace Beery in **JUDGEMENT OF THE STORM**. In 1924 he continued with roles in **THE SIGNAL TOWER**, **ROARING RAILS**, **SO BIG** and **CONFESSIONS OF A QUEEN**. The following year he was seen in **MIKE**, **MEMORY LANE**, **KIKI** and **COWBOY COP**. In 1927 he had roles in **JUDGEMENT OF THE HILLS** and **LONG PANTS** and was appropriately cast as **THE CIRCUS KID** in 1928. 1929 brought roles in **THE RAINBOW MAN**, **BLAZE 'O GLORY**, **GUN LAW**, **IDAHO RED** and **PRIDE OF PAWNEE**. Young Frank was a natural for films. With his unfailing ability to appear completely natural on the screen, coupled with that winning grin, he gained the reputation of 'stealing scenes' from adult stars. He was soon elevated to the rank of Juvenile Star. Because of his small size he was able to portray characters younger than his real age. When not involved with screen work he appeared on stage in a vaudeville act.

In 1934 Frankie was signed to play a jockey in **BROADWAY BILL** with Will Rogers and years later repeated the role when the film was re-made in 1950 as **RIDING HIGH** with Bing Crosby. In 1934 he was also featured in the Mascot serial, **BURN 'EM UP BARNES**. One of his best breaks came in 1935 when he was signed for the role of "Frankie Baxter" in the highly unusual **THE PHANTOM EMPIRE**, a combination western and science fiction Mascot serial, in twelve chapters, starring Gene Autry. Frankie was cast in the juvenile lead role, a pal

of Autry's, along with 12 year old Betsy King Ross, a champion girl rider. The serial told of the trio's thrilling adventures in 'Murania', a strange futuristic kingdom twenty thousand feet beneath the earth, ruled over by the beautiful Queen Tika (played by Dorothy Christy).

In publicity released in conjunction with the showing of the serial, Frankie commented:

"Don't misjudge me if I say I lead a fast life. But I have had to learn all about **speed** on the screen. I have ridden in, or on, everything imaginable, except, maybe, greased lightning. From racing automobiles in the Mascot serial **BURN 'EM UP BARNES** I went to the other extreme for **LITTLE MEN** by using an old-fashioned buggy. But the change back to dizzying speed soon came in my latest Mascot role "Frankie Baxter" in **THE PHANTOM EMPIRE**."

Frankie continued: "With Gene Autry, whom you probably heard sing on the radio before he came to Hollywood, and Betsy King Ross, the girl champion rider. I found myself aboard horses, autos, airplanes—and even parachutes! But the nth degree in fast stuff was the elevator leading down to Murania. Imagine an elevator which would zoom you down a shaft 20,000 feet below ground in a few seconds. And imagine finding, at the bottom, a city like nothing on earth, filled with the marvelous inventions and terrible dangers....It was the experience of my life, but now that it's over I'm willing to forsake speed for a while. Now, I think I'll leave my car in the garage for awhile, and go back to that slow, but safe, horse and buggy!"

As he grew into his late teens, Frankie began to be cast as tough young hoods. He also portrayed an endless variety of jockeys, bellhops, delivery boys, countermen and elevator operators. During 1940/41 he made a series of seven 'boy detective' films for Monogram. Beginning with **CHASING TROUBLE** in 1940 and concluding with **LET'S GO COLLEGIATE** in 1941. Frankie was assisted in this series by black comedian Mantan



Moreland.

Frankie's acting career was interrupted for a time while he served a stitch in the Navy during World War II. He returned to films in 1946 and was seen in four of the **Bowery Boys** series: **ANGEL'S ALLEY** (1947 as 'Jimmy'), **TROUBLE MAKERS** (1948 as 'Feathers'), **FIGHTING FOOLS** (1949 as 'Johnny Higgins') and **HOLD THAT BABY** (1949 as a character named 'Bananas'). With his short stature and easy way with a wise-crack, he was a natural for the series.

In 1950 Frankie was re-united with Gene Autry for **SONS OF NEW MEXICO**. This time, however, he was cast as an ex-jockey, who had gone astray and it was Frankie who supplied the villainy for the film. He remarked at the time:

"When this picture is released I'm going into hiding! At least I'm going to make sure I never set foot in Gene Autry, Oklahoma. You see, in this picture, besides just playfully bashing Gene over the skull with my gun, I also shove

him through a plate glass window and try my level-best to make life **scarce** for him. So after his friends see this picture, I'm a dead duck!" Then, recalling his earlier appearance with Autry in **THE PHANTOM EMPIRE**, in which he was the juvenile lead, and one of Gene's pals, he continued:

"Anyone that does remember me from that one is going to say—'Now, just look what's happened to that nice young kid'".

Film roles grew fewer in the 50's. In 1951 Frankie was seen in **ACROSS THE WIDE MISSOURI** and his last film appearance was in 1959 in **OPERATION PETTICOAT**. Turning to television, Frankie made frequent appearances with Red Skelton, usually portraying a 'tough old lady.'

Frankie Darro's private life contained many sorrows. His first wife committed suicide. In 1951 he married former actress Dorothy Carroll. On Christmas Day 1976, just three days after his 59th birthday, Frankie was fatally stricken with a heart attack while visiting friends. His many fine contributions to the screen world will long be remembered.

#### FILMOGRAPHY: FRANKIE DARRO

1. **JUDGEMENT OF THE STORM** (1923)
2. **THE SIGNAL TOWER** (1924)
3. **ROARING RAILS** (1924)
4. **SO BIG** (1925)
5. **CONFESSIONS OF A QUEEN** (1925)
6. **MIKE** (1926)
7. **MEMORY LANE** (1926)
8. **KIKI** (1926)
9. **COWBOY COP** (1926)
10. **LONG PANTS** (1927)
11. **JUDGEMENT OF THE HILLS** (1927)
12. **THE CIRCUS KID** (1928)
13. **THE RAINBOW MAN** (1929)
14. **BLAZE 'O GLORY** (1929)
15. **GUN LAW** (1929)
16. **IDAHO RED** (1929)
17. **THE PRIDE OF PAWNEE** (1929)
18. **THE PUBLIC ENEMY** (1931)
19. **THE MAD GENIUS** (1931)
20. **WAY BACK HOME** (1932)
21. **AMATEUR DADDY** (1932)
22. **THE MAYOR OF HELL** (1933)
23. **TUGBOAT ANNIE** (1933)
24. **WILD BOYS OF THE ROAD** (1933)
25. **LAUGHING AT LIFE** (1933)
26. **NO GREATER GLORY** (1934)
27. **BROADWAY BILL** (1934)
28. **THE MERRY FRINKS** (1934)
29. **BURN 'EM UP BARNES** (1934) serial
30. **LITTLE MEN** (1934)
31. **STRANDED** (1935)
32. **RED HOT TIRES** (1935)
33. **THREE KIDS AND A QUEEN** (1935)



A magazine clipping, date unknown. (Courtesy of Charles K. Stumpf.)



34. **THE PAY OFF** (1935)
35. **UNWELCOME STRANGER** (1935)
36. **THE PHANTOM EMPIRE** (1935) serial
37. **THE EX-MRS. BRADFORD** (1936)
38. **CHARLIE CHAN AT THE RACE TRACK** (1936)
39. **MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS** (1936)
40. **SARATOGA** (1937)
41. **THOROUGHBREDS DON'T CRY** (1937)
42. **BOYS REFORMATORY** (1938)
43. **JUVENILE COURT** (1938)
44. **WANTED BY THE POLICE** (1938)
45. **THE PERFECT FURLOUGH** (1938)
46. **WILD BILL HICKOK** (1938) serial
47. **PAUL STREET BOYS** (1939)
48. **IRISH LUCK** (1939)
49. **TOUGH KID** (1939)
50. **MEN WITH STEEL FACES** (1940)
51. **CHASING TROUBLE** (1940)
52. **ON THE SPOT** (1940)

53. **UP IN THE AIR** (1940)
54. **LAUGHING AT DANGER** (1940)
55. **TUXEDO JUNCTION** (1941)
56. **YOU'RE OUT OF LUCK** (1941)
57. **THE GANG'S ALL HERE** (1941)
58. **LET'S GO COLLEGIATE** (1941)
59. **FREDDIE STEPS OUT** (1946)
60. **THAT'S MY MAN** (1947)
61. **ANGEL'S ALLEY** (1947)
62. **TROUBLE MAKERS** (1948)
63. **HEART OF VIRGINIA** (1948)
64. **FIGHTING FOOLS** (1949)
65. **HOLD THAT BABY** (1949)
66. **RIDING HIGH** (1950)
67. **WYOMING MAIL** (1950)
68. **SONS OF NEW MEXICO** (1950)
69. **ACROSS THE WIDE MISSOURI** (1951)
70. **PAT AND MIKE** (1952)
71. **RACING BLOOD** (1954)
72. **OPERATION PETTICOAT** (1959)

-CKS

## KAY ALDRIDGE'S NEXT CHAPTER

by Paul Dellinger

See if you can identify a serial with a plot that goes like this:

A romantic young woman has been invited to go horseback riding by a handsome man but, as they make their way along the riding trail, the girl's horse runs away with her. The young man has galloped ahead and hasn't seen her horse bolt, and throw her against a tree. He doesn't know she's in trouble until her riderless horse shoots past him.

Immediately, our hero wheels his horse around and races back to find our heroine on the ground, injured. Does he risk injuring her further by sweeping her up in his arms and carrying her out of the woods? Or does he leave her alone to face who-knows-what kind of dangers while he seeks medical assistance? Is this the end of the chapter?

Not quite, because rescue comes suddenly from an unexpected source: a troop of Boy Scouts, using the same trail for training maneuvers, arrives on the scene and do those things for which Boy Scouts are famous—took off their coats and belts to make a stretcher and carry the hapless lass to safety.

Too hokey, you say, even for a serial? You could accept a girl downing a ferocious killer ape who laughs off bullets with a tiny knife, or go along with her surviving a fall from a cliff by landing in a river, but a troop of Boy Scouts is too much? Well, you're right--this wasn't a serial; it was real life, which is sometimes even stranger than serials. But the

star was Kay Aldridge, and this particular chapter in her life led to her starring in three of the most popular serials Republic produced, not to mention 21 feature films in which she appeared.

"It seems to be my fate to get discovered about once every 40 years," Miss Aldridge remarked during a visit in October 1981 to Roanoke, Virginia where she was a guest at RoVaCon 6, a convention of science-fiction and nostalgia buffs. Her rediscovery came in 1978, when she learned for the first time about collectors and fans of B-westerns and serials--and that her 1942 serial role as the star of **PERILS OF NYOKA** had brought her a legion of admirers she did not know she had.

The first discovery resulted from her being thrown from that horse. Another result was a broken hip, she said, and "this hip was one reason that I was discovered."

The path to the broken hip began at a water cooler, in Baltimore where Miss Aldridge went to work at age 17 as a secretary. "I used to drink a lot of water when I was working in the office," she said. "I used to go out in the hall to the water cooler, because that was where I thought you met the most attractive men." And that was where she met the man who invited her to go horseback riding.

"As luck would have it, the horse ran away with me," she said. "This riderless horse went on ahead and passed my boyfriend's horse, so he came galloping back through the woods--see, I wasn't even Nyoka yet, but here he came to the rescue--and there I was, all five foot





Emil Van Horn dressed in the gorilla costume as Satan menaces Kay Aldridge as Lorna Gray hesitates in this scene from Chapter One of **PERILS OF NYOKA** (1942, Republic). (Courtesy of Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store.)

eight and three-quarters, lying out on the path where I had been thrown, and there was quite a problem of what to do with me...He didn't know whether to gallantly pick me up and try to carry me out of the woods or whether to go for help."

The timely arrival of the scouts from a nearby boys' school solved the problem. "And this was heaven for me, because I was just recently out of a girls' boarding school myself." Miss Aldridge recalled that her long hair was pulled back into braids at the time. "So when the boys were making the stretcher, I was secretly getting the rubber bands off the ends of the hair and shaking it loose so it would be all wavy, so I would be more fascinating to carry out of the woods. Because, you see, at all times I was looking for my prince, and so these little boys didn't know it but one of them might have been elected. But anyway they carried me out of the woods and I must say I was in no pain, I was just loving being the center of attention."

Miss Aldridge was looking for her Prince Charming, she said, for two reasons. One, she was very much a romantic. And she was one of five children being raised by a widowed mother and some great-aunts who lived in a remote section of Virginia near Tappahannock in an old home named Bladensfield.

"I had hardly been to the movies in my life. I had never been to the theater, because we lived really a mile off the main road, five miles back in the woods in a house built in 1690. And so I had had more like a Civil War rearing than my own age rearing, because you don't know too many people my age who were raised by ladies who could remember the Civil War, who had physically been a part of the Civil War. You see, my great-aunts were in their seventies when they took us in. And so I've had this terrific contrast in my life, of growing up in this very, very poor-but-proud rural part of Virginia and then, in my lifetime, going to Hollywood."

**The Children of Bladensfield**, a book based





Kay Aldridge is menaced in Chapter Four of **PERILS OF NYOKA** (1942, Republic). (Courtesy of Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store.)

on the memoirs of one of the great-aunts, was published in 1978 by Viking Press. Miss Aldridge, whose writing appeared in parts of it, was on a trip publicizing it when she learned of her present-day following for the serials she had all but forgotten. Her new literary interest, in a way, led her back to her acting career.

"I always had the feeling that I had to save Bladensfield," she said. "Bladensfield--the roof leaked, we needed to pay the mortgage. You see, I was a Depression-time girl...I was before everything. Before television, before money, before bacon for breakfast--all kinds of things. Also, I was very romantic and I just thought, I was given this mystical idea that I'd go out into the world and I'd meet my Prince Charming and, for some reason, he'd want to fix the roof on Bladensfield and pay the mortgage and everything and we would live happily ever after."

Instead, she woke up the day after her riding accident in a full body cast and with nurses telling her she was in the newspaper. Reporters had thought her rescue made an interesting

story, and rushed to her home for a photograph of her. They got one taken when she was the Apple Blossom princess from her school, and a devoted cousin of hers happened to be carrying the clipping on a train trip to New York at the same time he was reading a magazine article about the model agent John Robert Powers seeking new talent.

"In this article, it said that Mr. Powers liked tall girls with regular features. Well, I was certainly tall, and fairly regular." The cousin visited the Powers studio and showed the agent that picture and others of Miss Aldridge, and Powers told him to have his young cousin drop by if she was ever in New York.

Miss Aldridge had lost her job--"I wasn't such a great secretary that they kept my job for me"--but got another at an Army office where she received an invitation from a cadet at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. to come up for the spring dances. Her mother allowed her to accept, so long as she took her sister along to chaperone.

"We sneaked down to see John Robert





Kay Aldridge is up in the air in trouble as Lorna Gray looks on in this scene from Chapter Six of **PERILS OF NYOKA** (1942, Republic). (Courtesy of Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store.)

Powers and I never left New York, I never went back to my job. He said, 'I'm just so sure that you'll make a good living' and I got so excited telling him my life story and how poor we were and how I had to make enough money to put plumbing in my house and pay off the mortgage. And so he took me in the inner office and he talked to me, and he said 'Now you'll have to go and have your picture made' and I said 'I don't have any money' because I had no money over and above my ticket home. Nobody had any money then...I love to think about this because I'm encouraging grandchildren now to take a chance. I just went to New York with no clothes, no training to be a model, nothing except I had had a lot of love from my mother and my family, and I enjoy life."

Soon she found herself on the cover of **Life** about three times, **Redbook** some fourteen times, **Ladies Home Journal** and elsewhere when, within about six months, she was picked out as one of the ten most photographed models in the world to appear in a motion

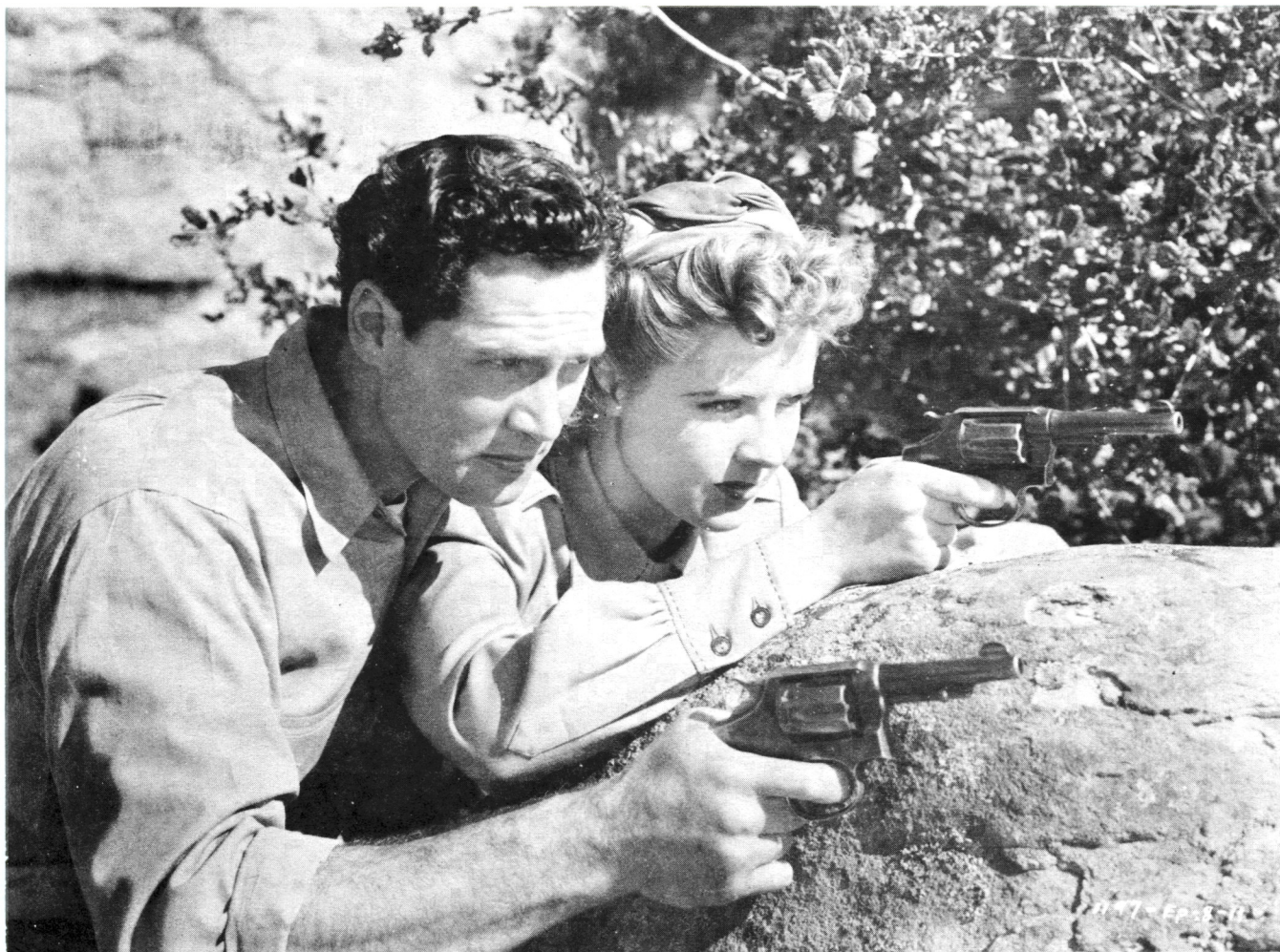
picture, **VOGUES OF 1938** with Warner Baxter, Joan Bennett, and an unbilled Katharine Aldridge. She didn't know it at the time, but it was the start of a change from modeling to acting for her career.

"We thought we were the cat's whiskers, we really did," Miss Aldridge laughed, "but after we'd been there (in Hollywood) about a week, we'd only met producers and directors and what we thought were funny older men. And so we were all asking: Where are the boys? You know? We were all interested in romance. So I was elected to be the spokeswoman for the ten of us. We went to Mr. Wanger's office (Walter Wanger, the producer) and complained that we hadn't met any boys."

Wanger got on the phone. "Jimmy," he said to whoever answered, "I've got ten lovely girls over here." Jimmy arrived on the scene very quickly--Jimmy Stewart, a rather gangling young actor, a little shy facing ten nice, lonely girls, and shuffling his feet awkwardly as he spoke to them in his hesitant drawl.

"This, this is terrible," he said. "This is just





Clayton Moore and Kay Aldridge fight off the villains in this scene from Chapter Eight of **PERILS OF NYOKA** (1942, Republic). (Courtesy of Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store.)

turrible. Y-y-y-you say you don't know any boys? I-I-I live with my friend, Johnny Swope, and-and-and Josh Logan, and Hank Fonda, and--we like girls!"

Another social event was a movie star party the girls all went to the following Saturday night.

"And in those days you had to have a bosom. You've forgotten how important bosoms were! Well, in those days, you couldn't tell the front of me from the back. So we all, at that time, were using cocoa butter. We thought that if we rubbed cocoa butter, that by Saturday night we could all be like Lana Turner! We only managed to smell like Hershey Bars."

**VOGUES OF 1938** was a United Artists movie. Miss Aldridge appeared next in a Nelson Eddy-Eleanor Powell musical for MGM, **ROSALIE** (1937) and at 20th Century-Fox with Linda Darnell and James Ellison in **HOTEL FOR WOMEN** (1939).

She remained at Fox for **HERE I AM A STRANGER** (1939) with Richard Greene, Richard Dix and Gladys George; **FREE, BLONDE AND**

**21** (1940) with Lynn Bari, Mary Beth Hughes and Robert Lowery; **SHOOTING HIGH** (1940) with Jane Withers and Gene Autry; **GIRL IN 313** (1940) with Florence Rice and Kent Taylor; **SAILOR'S LADY** (1940), Nancy Kelly, Jon Hall and Dana Andrews (and a young Larry Crabbe, better known as "Buster"); **GIRL FROM AVENUE A** (1940), Jane Withers and Kent Taylor; **YESTERDAY'S HEROES** (1940), Jean Rogers and Robert Sterling; **DOWN ARGENTINE WAY** (1940), Don Ameche and Betty Grable; **GOLDEN HOOFES** (1941), Jane Withers and Charles "Buddy" Rogers; **DEAD MEN TELL** (1941), Sidney Toler (as "Charlie Chan") and George Reeves (TV's future "Superman"); and then in 1941 a couple for Warner Brothers, **NAVY BLUES** and **YOU'RE IN THE ARMY NOW** where Miss Aldridge was part of the Navy Blues Sextet (so was Marguerite Chapman, the female lead in Republic's 1942 **SPY SMASHER** serial, and Claire James, who was in Columbia's 1947 serial version of **JACK ARMSTRONG**). She was one of many show girls in Paramount's **LOUISIANA PURCHASE**





Robert Strange and Kay Aldridge are tied to a post as Charles Middleton awaits orders from Lorna Gray in this scene from Chapter Nine of **PERILS OF NYOKA** (1942, Republic). (Courtesy of Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store.)

(1941), an Irving Berlin musical with Bob Hope. She would have little more to do in her next few feature films--**THE FALCON'S BROTHER** (1942, RKO), in which the Falcon of previous films, George Sanders, is killed and his brother--played by real-life brother Tom Conway--takes over and appears in the rest of the series; **SOMETHING TO SHOUT ABOUT** (1943, Columbia), **DU BARRY WAS A LADY** (1943, MGM), with Red Skelton, Lucille Ball and Gene Kelly. Her appearances in those were small and sometimes incidental; in her earlier films, she was usually cast--perhaps because Hollywood did not look into her background beyond the New York model image--as the rich or spoiled city girl who never got the man.

And that led her into the three serial ventures for which so many fans remember her today.

"Hollywood didn't understand me," she said, even though models were not exactly what the west coast people may have thought. "In those days, we were more like private citizen girls who just happened to use Pond's Cold Cream,

and we weren't as professionally--hard, I don't think we were...so 20th Century-Fox would cast me in a movie with Betty Grable, Don Ameche or Tyrone Power, and who would be the other woman? I would be the other woman, and I would have to be very, very mean to the whole football team. If the football team met me, they couldn't play football."

Miss Aldridge eventually decided the cold, haughty image was not her type. "So when I heard that they were testing for this serial queen, to be sort of a super-woman and be outdoorsy and romping and everything, I thought that would be fun. And besides, I would be the lead rather than a featured player. So I went over and I told them that I was a great horsewoman and a great athlete, which I'm not especially, and I got the part as Nyoka."

**PERILS OF NYOKA** remains one of Republic's best-known serials. Released in 1942, it seemed to be a sequel to Republic's 1941 serial **JUNGLE GIRL** which, in turn, was





Tris Coffin has the drop on Clayton Moore as Kay Aldridge faints in this scene from Chapter Ten of **PERILS OF NYOKA** (1942, Republic). (Courtesy of Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store.)

supposed to be based on a book by the creator of "Tarzan," Edgar Rice Burroughs. In reality, it was not.

Burroughs' **Jungle Girl** novel, published in 1932, recounted the adventures of a Cambodian princess named Fou-tan who fled into the jungle from a royally-ordained marriage to be rescued from a tiger by a young American doctor. By the end of the story, she has fallen in love with the doctor and he has risen to become the leader of her people.

Republic kept the book's title but changed everything else. The jungle girl was not a princess but a girl named Nyoka Meredith (portrayed by Frances Gifford). The doctor in the story was her father, who raised her from childhood in the African jungle where he worked and who is killed off in the first chapter by his criminal twin brother (both roles were played by Trevor Bardette). The plot dealt with possession of an amulet which controlled a tribe of Lion Men and possession of their hidden diamond treasure. Nyoka's allies in the cliffhanger are fliers Jack Stanton (Tom Neal,

who would later star in Columbia's **BRUCE GENTRY** serial) and Curly (Eddie Acuff), opposed by villains Bardette, Gerald Mohr as Slick Latimer and Frank Lackteen as Shamba.

In **PERILS OF NYOKA**, all reference was dropped to Burroughs (along with royalties) and Nyoka was re-cast and re-named. Kay Aldridge played Nyoka Gordon, and even her father, this time named Henry Gordon (Robert Strange) was resurrected--alive, but missing. An amnesia victim, he ruled a tribe Tigerman (as opposed to the Lion Men of **JUNGLE GIRL**) and is re-united with his daughter with memory regained later in the 15-chapter serial (which had each chapter title composed of two words, no more and no less).

The male hero this time is a doctor, Larry Grayson (the first major role for future "Lone Ranger" Clayton Moore) who is with an expedition searching for the Lost Tablets of Hippocrates which promise a cure for cancer as well as the key to buried treasure. Also in the expedition is William Benedict as "Red," who was associated with the Bowery Boys as





William Benedict, Forbes Murray, Kay Aldridge, Clayton Moore and Robert Strange hold a council of war in this scene from Chapter Ten of **PERILS OF NYOKA** (1942, Republic). (Courtesy of Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store.)

"Whitey."

The villains include Charles Middleton as a tribal leader (Middleton's most famous villainy is as "Ming" in the **FLASH GORDON** serials), Tris Coffin as a member of the expedition working secretly for the opposition, and Lorna Gray (who also acted under the name of Adrian Booth in both serials and westerns) as "Vultura," ruler of the Tuaregs. Although women as serial heroines dated back to the silent movie days, this serial marked the first time both good and evil forces were led by ladies.

Animals got into the act, too. Nyoka is ably assisted by a dog and monkey, and Vultura by an ape aptly named Satan (played by Emil Van Horn in a gorilla suit). It is Satan who accidentally spears Vultura in the last chapter fight between her and Nyoka and, when Larry's bullets fail to bring him down in the aftermath, Nyoka finishes him herself with a knife.

Ace stuntman David Sharpe doubled for most of the major male characters in the serial and,

from a distance, even for Miss Aldridge which distressed her no end. "I don't want people to think I look like you, David," she would tell him. Miss Aldridge says she never understood the difference between a film and a serial which is divided into chapters, and never saw any of these until 1978 when she saw them after meeting some of her fans during her book tour.

The Nyoka character faced plenty of perils, as indicated in the title. In his **Valley of the Cliffhangers**, Jack Mathis counts 19 major ones including every chapter ending. It is no wonder **PERILS OF NYOKA** is remembered so fondly along with its star.

The Republic action-directorial team of William Witney and John English had broken up by then, with Witney directing **NYOKA** and English directing **DAREDEVILS OF THE WEST** (1943), which marked Miss Aldridge's second serial appearance. The one previous serial was enough for Republic to bill her as "The Serial Queen" and **DAREDEVILS'** leading man, Allan



Lane, had played "Sgt. King" of the Mounties in two previous Republic chapter-plays and so was billed "The Serial King." Eddie Acuff--who had been the secondary good guy in the earlier **JUNGLE GIRL**--performed similar service here as "Red," which was William Benedict's name in **PERILS OF NYOKA** when he did the same for Clayton Moore. (Another tie-in between **DAREDEVILS** and **NYOKA** was that both had outdoor scenes shot at Iverson's Ranch and, in the third chapter of **DAREDEVILS**, viewers caught a glimpse of Vultura's temple, still standing, from **NYOKA**.)

Full of action, with one sequence building into another, **DAREDEVILS** has brain heavies Robert Frazer and Ted Adams, with action heavies William Haade and George J. Lewis, against "Duke Cameron" (Lane), a cavalry officer, and "June Foster" (Miss Aldridge) who takes over a stage line after the death of her father to fulfill a road contract that would rob the crooks of a land takeover. As complicated as that might sound, it never got in the way of the frenetic pace of the serial.

It was only Miss Aldridge's second western, the first having been **SHOOTING HIGH** with Gene Autry. That was also Autry's only 20th Century-Fox picture, and the only one he starred in during his career where he did not play himself. Instead, he was known as "Wild Bill Carson," a movie star called upon to settle a family feud at a movie location. Miss Aldridge played "Evelyn Trent," the cowboy's co-star in the movie within the movie (Jane Withers and Marjorie Weaver were the co-stars for outside the movie-movie sequences).

But the people at Fox told Miss Aldridge that her role in the movie was significant for another reason.

"They called me into the office. They were all excited. They said, 'Kay, this is your big opportunity, you're going to get to kiss Gene Autry. He's never been kissed (on the screen) and you're to ride in this buckboard, and he's going to sing **That Little Old Band of Gold** to you, and you're going to be his first kiss. It's very important. We want a very pure, innocent-looking girl and you're just right for it.'"

The Fox people were apparently unfamiliar with Republic's **THE BIG SHOW**, released four years earlier, in which Autry played a dual role and kissed a different girl in each guise. But the big moment came anyway, with Miss Aldridge supposedly riding a buckboard, which was actually being shaken by a couple prop men underneath ("You know, you have to be a great actress to be sung to because you run out of expressions," she said), and becoming increasingly self-conscious under the heavy

make-up that had been piled on for the close up. As the camera moved in, Miss Aldridge recalls, a heavily-lipsticked lip caught on a front tooth, and she had to casually reach up and flick it free with a finger.

"And it's on little things like that that careers flounder," she laughed.

Craig Allison, who currently organizes a monthly film festival of B-movies and serials at Wytheville, Virginia told Miss Aldridge during her Roanoke visit how much her serials had been enjoyed by audiences at those festivals. The only regret was that none of the collectors who provide films had been able to find more than two surviving chapters of **DAREDEVILS** to show.

Looking up from signing an autograph, Miss Aldridge deadpanned: "I'm the surviving chapter."

Just as Clayton Moore went on to star in several serials and become the **LONE RANGER** on the long-running TV series and two color movies, Lane went on to co-star with Linda Stirling in Republic's **TIGER WOMAN** (1944)--her first serial and his last. Then he made three separate western series for the studio, one as Allan Lane, the second succeeding "Wild Bill" Elliott in the Red Ryder series, and finally as Allan "Rocky" Lane which continued practically up to the demise of the B-western. Later he provided the voice for MR. ED, TV's talking horse.

Also in 1944, Miss Aldridge made the last of her three Republic serials--**HAUNTED HARBOR**. The star was Kane Richmond, whose serial career included one of the worst serials ever made, **LOST CITY** (1935), and one which has been called by a segment of fans the best action serial ever produced, **SPY SMASHER** (1942). Richmond played Jim Marsden, a ship captain whose craft had been lost at sea--sunk, as it turned out--with gold bullion aboard. Under suspicion of scuttling and looting it himself, Marsden loses the rest of his holdings in a foreclosure by a man later murdered. As if Marsden didn't have enough trouble, he is charged with the murder, too, and must break jail--with the help of two loyal crew members played by Clancy Cooper and a young Marshall Reed who had only started appearing in movies the previous year. They flee to an island where Marsden cannot be extradicted and where he has a job assured, trying to get native workers over their fear of a haunted harbor. On the way, they find a wrecked vessel sinking fast, with a doctor and his daughter aboard, and rescue them. The daughter, Patricia Harding, is played by Miss Aldridge.

Having lost a father temporarily to amnesia in **NYOKA** and having another father murdered



in **DAREDEVILS**, Miss Aldridge again becomes an orphan when Roy Barcroft, an island resident who seems to be on Marsden's side, kills him rather than risk exposure of his real identity. Barcroft, Republic's ace villain in endless films, is also the man who committed the murder for which Marsden is blamed.

**HAUNTED HARBOR** was based on a 1943 novel by Dayle Douglas, and stuck much closer to its source than had **JUNGLE GIRL** to Burroughs' book. Harding's daughter was Lisseth, rather than Patricia, in the book and she was 19 years old, rather than 27 as Miss Aldridge was. The book's romance between the captain and girl became more of an allies-against-the-bad-guys relationship on screen.

**HARBOR** even had a sea monster (which turned out to be a mechanical dummy designed by Barcroft's gang to keep the natives away from the gold ship that had been sunk). Marsden and Patricia encounter it in chapter five, but Barcroft's spy in their midst (George Lewis) has loaded their firearm with blanks, so the monster seems invulnerable. After the usual number of fisticuffs and hair-breath rescues, and the loss of one of Marsden's friends (Reed) in a fight with henchmen Kenne Duncan and Bud Geary, the bad guys are cleaned up--Barcroft dies when his stolen molten gold is inadvertently poured on him--and Marsden is cleared.

After **HARBOR**, Miss Aldridge made a pair of 1945 films with Dave O'Brien at PRC. O'Brien was best known as a western star, including PRC's "Texas Ranger" series co-starring first with James Newill and then Tex Ritter. In **THE MAN WHO WALKED ALONE**, he and Miss Aldridge pair up for a romantic comedy; in **THE PHANTOM OF 42ND STREET**, they must solve a murder committed in a Broadway theater.

Those two films came out after she had retired from the screen in favor of marriage. She and the late Arthur Cameron, a Texas wildcat oilman, were married on Valentine's Day in 1945. The union produced daughters Melissa and Carey and sons Arthur and Scott. But the marriage finally ended in a separation and divorce after about eleven years. In 1956, Miss Aldridge was married to artist Richard Derby Taylor. They eventually moved to Camden, Maine where Miss Aldridge, now a widow, still lives.

It was during her husband's illness that someone sent her a clipping from a question-answer column where someone asked whether Kay (Nyoka) Aldridge was still living. After her personal life settled down again, she responded to the letter-writer that, yes, Nyoka

was very much alive. That soon resulted in the contact with her fans that has taken her to film festivals around the country. She has even made appearances in a new Nyoka costume and fought off men in gorilla suits until a dashing stand-in for Clayton Moore steps in to save her. At a western film festival, a few years ago, that role was handled by the late Don "Red" Barry, himself a serial star in the 1940 **THE ADVENTURES OF RED RYDER**. In Roanoke, the part went to Jody McGhee, a North Carolina film buff who described it as "the biggest thrill of my life."

"Poor old Nyoka," Miss Aldridge said to her enthralled Roanoke audience after the arduous battle with the pseudo-gorilla on stage between showing of two **NYOKA** chapters. "I don't know how many fights I have left in me...but it's a lot of fun to be here in 1981."

Her recollections of her serial co-stars were also of interest. Clayton Moore, she said, "was a very well-ordered, generous and nice kind of person. Less conceited." She remembered Kane Richmond similarly, but felt Allan Lane "was not as nice a person as Clayton Moore...He had very great leading man possibilities but I think his relationships with people were not so good."

She would remind questioners that these serials amounted to only six weeks or so of work in a very busy life, and her recollections of them are not all that thorough. After all, she had no idea it would be the serials for which she would be so well remembered!

"And what I think is very touching and poignant is that those million-dollar movies I made...I made any number of A-movies at Fox--people don't know about those. I'm remembered for these serials, these cheap-budget fast-action serials. And Fred," she said, referring to Dr. Fred Eichelman, a social studies department head at the high school where RoVaCon was held, "says that it has social significance, that I was ahead of my time, that I was a liberated woman, that I didn't depend on any man."

Obviously still a fun-loving person, Miss Aldridge spent a good deal of her visit chiding Dr. Eichelman about those social implications of her serial roles. But Eichelman, author of **Star Studded Classrooms** (Jalamap Publications, Charleston, West Virginia, 1981), has written extensively about the use of just such films to drive home any number of cultural points in social studies classes.

Miss Aldridge is also the subject of a book by Merrill T. McCord, **Perils of Kay Aldridge: Life of the Serial Queen** (Alhambra Publishers, Box 9678, Washington, D.C. 20016), and invariably spends much of her time during



personal appearances these days autographing copies of it. She tends to be more thoughtful in the composing of those autographs than the average celebrity; she makes them more than a mere signature, adding a little personal message to the person seeking the autograph if she has had time to get to know something about that person. Miss Aldridge is one celebrity who seems as interested in learning about her fans as they are about her.

Her three serials brought the characters she played almost full circle. Burroughs' **JUNGLE GIRL** was set in southeast Asia instead of Africa but, by the time she was in **HAUNTED**

**HARBOR**, the setting had gone from Africa back to southeast Asia. There had just been a little detour in between to the wild west.

Another point of interest was that, following her **NYOKA** serial, Fawcett--which had had some of its comics characters like **Captain Marvel** and **Spy Smasher** borrowed by Republic for serials--began publishing **Nyoka** stories in some of its comics. Later, Charlton Comics took over the character following Fawcett's withdrawal from publishing comic books, and made her a blonde. The earlier drawing of the character had resembled Miss Aldridge. -PD

# BRUCE GENTRY:

## *Daredevil of the Skies*

by Paul Dellinger

It may have been unintentional that **BRUCE GENTRY**--Daredevil of the Skies is one of the funniest serials ever made. Then again, the serial veterans who put it together may have been having some fun with the genre on purpose.

**BRUCE GENTRY** was released by Columbia in 1949, but it almost had a Republic look to it--the furious action, the pell-mell pace, the well-choreographed fights (that was due in large part to stuntmen Dale Van Sickel, Tom Steele and Eddie Parker doubling for everyone as well as playing roles of their own). It was one of only three serials Columbia would issue in '49, the others being **ADVENTURES OF SIR GALAHAD** (which gave Charles King a chance to play good-guy comic sidekick to future **SUPERMAN** George Reeves) and **BATMAN AND ROBIN**. Among Republic's three for the year was **KING OF THE ROCKET MEN**, starring Tris Coffin who, like King, would also be featured in **BRUCE GENTRY**.

**BRUCE GENTRY** starred Tom Neal, whose only other serial starring role had been eight years earlier in Republic's **JUNGLE GIRL**, with Frances Gifford originating the role of "Nyoka." In that earlier serial, Neal played an aviator named "Jack Stanton" and, as Bruce Gentry, he was still an aviator. Almost one entire chapter of **BRUCE GENTRY** has Neal being chased by the bad guys in a desert-like locale, which must have been good practice for his Lippert feature that year, **RED DESERT**, in which Don "Red" Barry spends most of the movie chasing him through one. Neal would continue as a

villain--supposedly the brains behind the gang--in Lash LaRue's 1951 **KING OF THE BULLWHIP**, even though in one scene he saves Lash and Al "Fuzzy" St. John from a lynching. He was given top billing in **THE DALTON'S WOMEN** (1951), a strange little movie that seemed to be (but wasn't) a sexy western and which brought Lash and Fuzzy in towards the end to round up the baddies.

The Gentry character originated in a comic strip, where he was one of the successors to **Dick Tracy** along with the likes of **Secret Agent X-9**, **Inspector Wade** and **Radio Patrol**. Neal gave him a devil-may-care dash and Columbia gave him a topical mystery to solve--the secret of the "flying saucers," so named only a couple of years earlier by a flyer named Kenneth Arnold who reported seeing some. This was two years before the UFO flap over Washington, and prior to science-fiction movies like **THE THING**, **THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL** and **THIS ISLAND EARTH** wherein the saucers were spaceships from other worlds. The earlier explanation was that flying discs were devices of "a foreign power" (in those days, the actual nations were seldom named). Unfortunately, these early flying discs were cartoon animations (like the flying Man of Steel in Kirk Alyn's two Columbia **SUPERMAN** serials, and the spaceships in the studio's 1951 version of TV's **CAPTAIN VIDEO**) and lacked the polish Republic might have given them.

**BRUCE GENTRY** was directed by Spencer Bennet and Thomas Carr. Its music was directed by Mischa Bakaleinikoff, who handled music for practically all Columbia's B-westerns and serials from the mid-1940s on, an





The Title Lobby Card. (Courtesy of Film Favorites.)

accomplishment in itself. The same opening credits score used for **BRUCE GENTRY** would be used note for note two years later in **CAPTAIN VIDEO**.

Blonde winsome Judy Clark was the **BRUCE GENTRY** female lead and Ralph Hodges played her brother. The relationship sometimes seemed like that on radio's and TV's **SKY KING** of young "Penny" and "Clipper" to "Uncle Sky." Forrest Taylor repeated the role he nearly patented of the brilliant scientist whose brain the baddies want to pick. Tristram Coffin gave the villains their orders, fronting for a mystery villain known as The Recorder, and veterans Jack Ingram, Terry Frost, Eddie Parker and Charles King even made the action heavies almost likeable, looking for all the world like the Three Stooges at times when Gentry is running rings around them, and bickering among themselves with a realism seldom seen in serials ("Who made you superintendent?" demands one, when another tries to give him an order) but almost worth the price of admission by itself for this one.

Still more villainy was supplied by Stephen

Carr, the co-director's brother, who is not only a double-agent but a triple one in the later chapter confusion over who is on whose side. Dale Van Sickel plays several roles, including that of the man who brings Gentry into the case originally and a bodyguard (along with Tom Steele) to Hugh Prosser as the man who hires Gentry to uncover the secret of the saucers. Neal, even when dwarfed physically by Van Sickel and Steele, strikes a dashing figure in his fur-collared leather jacket and flight cap, and gives his lines just the light touch of wisecrackery this particular serial thrives on.

### Chapter One THE MYSTERIOUS DISC

Bruce Gentry (Tom Neal) is hired to provide aerial transportation for Dr. Alexander Benson (Forrest Taylor), a famous scientist who is supposed to be working to protect the Canal Zone from an anticipated attack by a foreign power against the western hemisphere. In flight, Bruce's controls appear to be overheating, and his airplane is almost struck by a





Tom Neal has decked a villain in this Lobby Card. (Courtesy of Film Favorites.)

flying disc which explodes nearby when Bruce eludes it.

Bruce is chatting with Dr. Benson at Benson's quarters when Allen (Jack Ingram), Chandler (Terry Frost) and Krendon (Tristram Coffin) barge in and order Benson to come with them. Bruce tries to stop them, but is stunned in the fight. He pursues their car in his own, but they shoot out his tire. Undaunted, he pulls a motorized mini-bike from the trunk and continues the pursuit, but the thugs reach an airfield and take off with Benson before Bruce can catch them.

"Gentry is the one man I know who can solve the mystery of these flying discs," proclaims wealthy industrialist Radcliffe (Hugh Prosser), but he tells his secretary he had no idea how to bring Gentry to his office for the job. "I'm sure Mr. Gentry would come to the aid of a lady in distress," the sultry secretary says.

"Stand up," says Radcliffe. She does, and her boss apparently approves of what he sees. "Very nice," he says. "It's worth a try."

Radcliffe's own bodyguards pretend to be

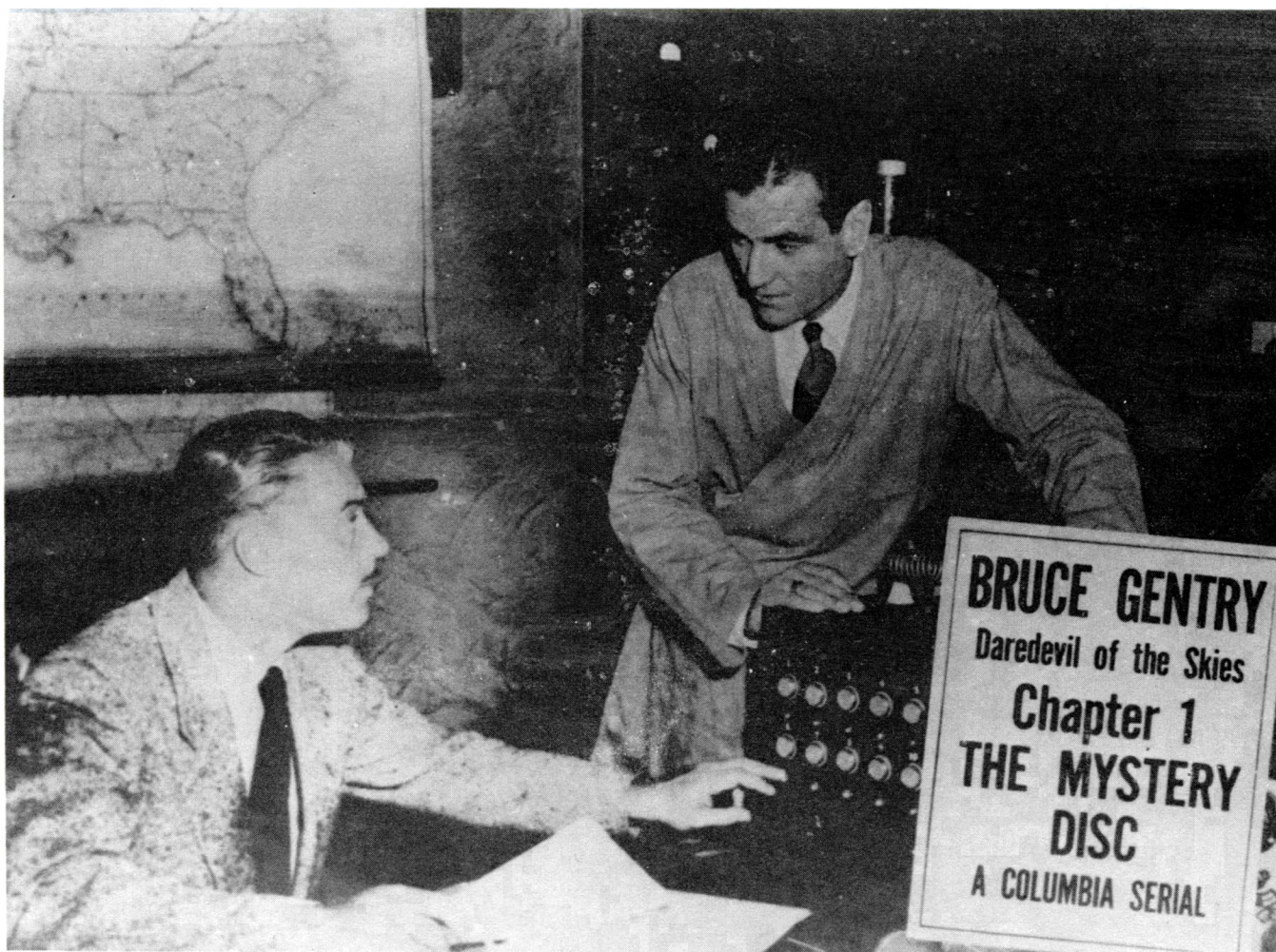
chasing the lady, who flees to Bruce's car to ask for help. "You interest me. Get in," says Bruce, and the chase is on--but not for long. Bruce obviously is not fooled, and tells the girl her pursuers have gone to so much trouble it would be a shame not to let them catch up. The upshot is that Bruce does make it to Radcliffe's office and accepts the assignment, which he probably would have done if the secretary had simply requested up front that he meet with her boss.

Meanwhile, Dr. Benson is being questioned in a cavernous hideaway by Krendon. When Benson demands to know why he has been kidnapped, Krendon replies: "Our leader, who is known as The Recorder, will answer that."

The reason he is known by that title is because the leader gives his instructions via a pre-recorded tape. He tells Benson he expects to enlist his help in improving his discs so he can launch his attack against the western world.

Bruce, seeking the source of the discs, is flying over a ranch belonging to Juanita Farrell (Judy Clark) and her brother, Frank (Ralph





Head Henchman Tris Coffin gets ready to give orders via radio in this scene on a Lobby Card. (Courtesy of Film Favorites.)

Hodges). Someone is trying to frighten them into leaving their ranch, and they wonder aloud if the plane overhead contains that someone.

The plane is also being watched on instruments in The Recorder's lair. "Stand by to launch a disc," Krendon orders. Again Bruce's controls seem to be overheating but, this time, the disc does not miss. It explodes and blows up the plane in mid-air.

## Chapter Two MINE OF MENACE

But Bruce has been through this overheating bit before and know what it means. He bails out before the disc destroys his plane, and his parachute becomes entangled in a tree where he dangles as Nita Farrell arrives to investigate, thinking the chutist may be one of those pestering the ranch. Bruce engages her in carefree small talk, ignoring the weapon she keeps pointing at him, until the real crooks show up to finish him. Frank arrives with his own firepower in time to chase them off and,

on meeting Bruce, exclaims: "You run an airline in South America! I've heard of you!" The new allies check the wreckage of Bruce's plane and find an object, apparently from the disc, lodged in it.

Krendon, meanwhile, drags out Dr. Benson again to hear more taped threats from The Recorder. "Do you insist on going through this nonsense again? I'm not a child," Benson grumbles, but Krendon insists on playing the tape anyway. The Recorder demands that Benson help find a rare substance for future use in the fleet of discs.

Nita, out on a horseback ride, finds herself taken prisoner by the crew that had been seeking Bruce. Frank and Bruce see her riderless horse, and backtrack to where Nita is being held at an abandoned mine, actually the source of the substance the criminals are seeking. A fight ensues, and one of the gangsters (Tom Steele) tries to escape in the truck which contains Nita. It rolls down a cliff, seemingly carrying her to her doom.





Ralph Hodges and Judy Clark as brother and sister assist Tom Neal in this scene from Chapter Two of **BRUCE Gentry** (1949, Columbia). (Courtesy of Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store.)

### Chapter Three FIERY FURNACE

But Bruce has jumped on the vehicle and gotten Nita out before it rolls off. He and his friends then drive after the remaining criminals. Krendon contacts his men in the fleeing car by radio, asking if they have the substance. Allen replies that it was lost when their truck went over a cliff. What is worse, Gentry is chasing them. "Stop him," Krendon orders. "We can't. We lost our guns back at the mine," says Allen. Krendon may be tempted by then to tell his crew to give themselves up, but they do manage to escape. Krendon also wants the disc part, a detonator, back from Gentry, and The Recorder--in another taped lecture--orders Benson to give the formula for Element 99, another factor in improving the discs. Benson refuses.

Bruce, after a little harmless flirting with Radcliffe's secretary, traces the components in the disc detonator to a shipping yard. He and Frank slip into it at night, only to find The

Recorder's men getting rid of any evidence in the crates that might incriminate them. Bruce is nearly discovered but hides himself in one of the crates. Unfortunately, he picked one that the men had been about to shove into a furnace to destroy it--and they do just that!

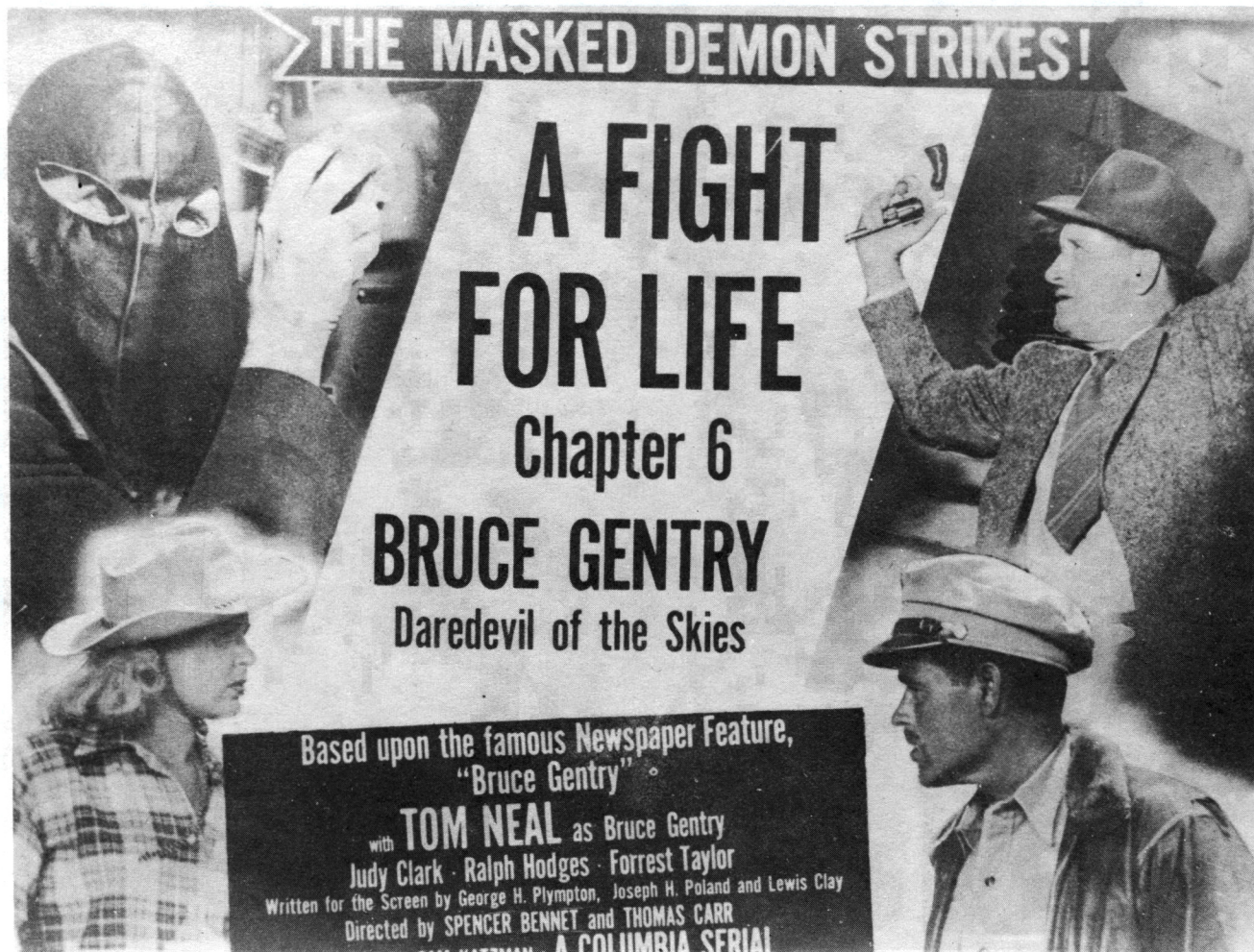
### Chapter Four GRADE CROSSING

Using his handy pocketknife, Bruce has pried his way out of the crate while the attention of the men was on a noise Frank had made. He slips out of the crate before they return to burn it. He and Frank finally resort to fighting their way out of the place.

"I suppose I have to listen to your master's voice," Benson says tiredly as Krendon's men bring him out of confinement for more threats from The Recorder. Meanwhile back at the ranch, Nita is bemoaning the possibility of losing it. "If this world organization succeeds, we'll all lose our liberty," Bruce informs her.

Bruce and Frank visit Benson's home looking





The Recorder, Judy Clark and Tom Neal take up three corners of this Title Card. (Courtesy of Film Favorites.)

for clues to his whereabouts, and are promptly clobbered from behind by Allen and Chandler. Bruce regains consciousness in time to turn on a dictaphone and record their dialing of a telephone number. Playing back the recording, he can tell from the number of clicks what number was called and, dialing it, learns it is the Pyramid Parking Lot. Sneaking in there, he overhears plans for using a machine to stop a train and hijack the material it is carrying for use in the discs.

He and Frank race to the crossing where the train is to be stopped. Leaping from a rock, Bruce attacks the would-be hijackers. Frank tangles with Chandler, grabbing onto the car in which Chandler tries to escape. He gets in and stops it, on the tracks, but is knocked unconscious by Chandler and left inside as the approaching train bears down on the vehicle.

#### Chapter Five DANGER TRAIL

Bruce reaches the car and gets it started,

barely in time to move it out of the train's path. Then he manages to eavesdrop on Allen and Chandler as they get radioed orders to proceed to a secret base. Bruce leaves Frank and Nita to watch as he goes to get a radio device so they can follow the men to the base.

"Now all we have to do is get one of these in their truck," says Frank.

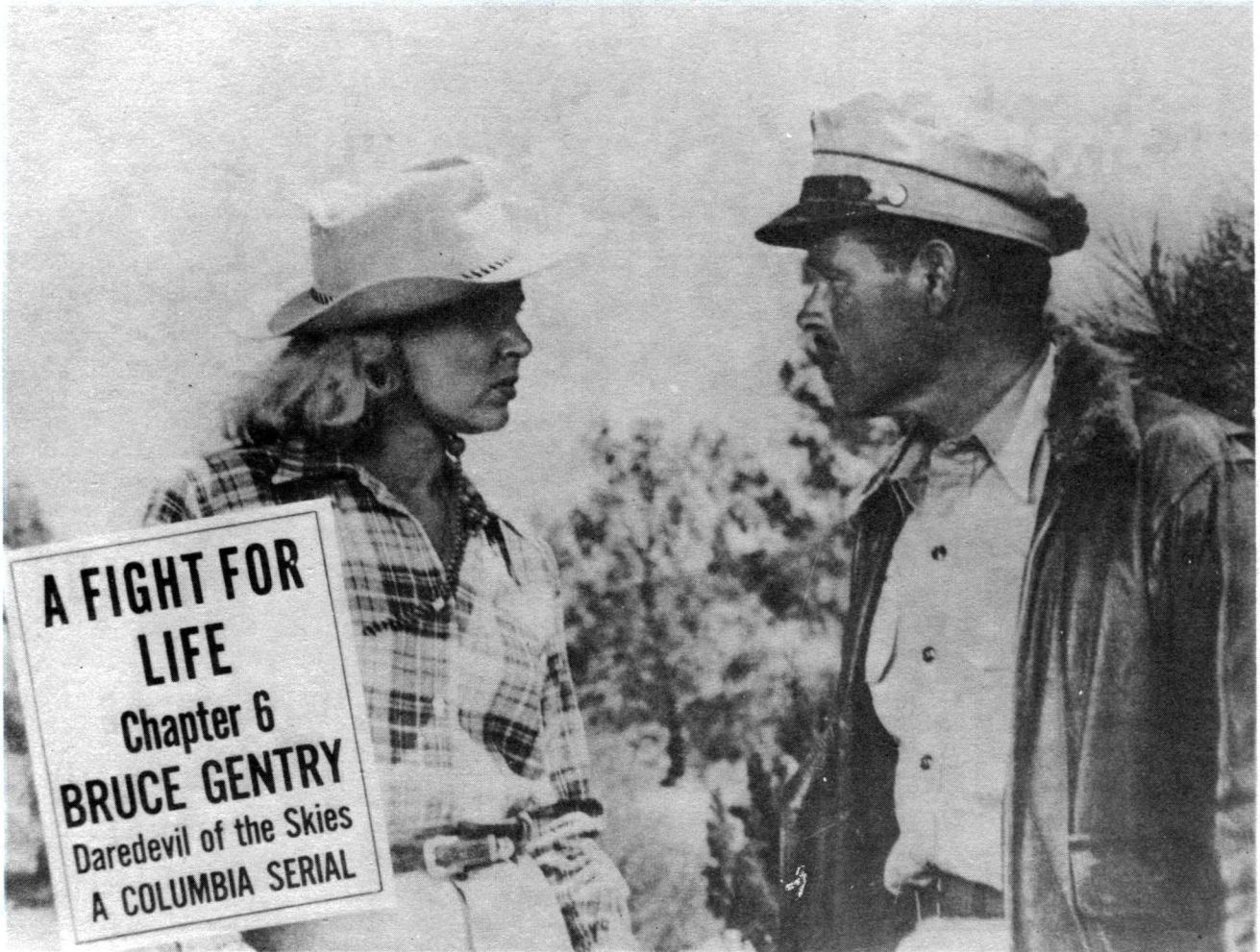
"But how, with all those men around it?" Nita wonders.

"Bruce has a plan," says Frank. And indeed he does. He walks up with the device, hands it to Frank, and says: "Here. Put this in the truck."

There is a little more to it than that. Bruce rolls a barrel down a hill and distracts the men long enough for Frank to plant the device--but not in time for Frank to slip away again. Instead Frank hides in the back of the truck, too. Krendon, radioing his men as they drive to the base, picks up the hum of the transmitter and orders them to check for the source of the buzz.

Ivor (Charles King), sitting in the back of the





Judy Clark and Tom Neal have a conference in this scene on a Lobby Card. (Courtesy of Film Favorites.)

truck, asks: "Why'd you stop?"

"Aw, we've got to search the truck," complains Allen.

"What for?"

"We don't know."

"Then how are you gonna know when you find it?"

They not only find the device, but Frank as well. They tie him up and use the transmitter to lure Bruce and Nita into an ambush. They shoot out the tire to Bruce's car (again!), it heads for the edge of a cliff out of sight, and there is a splash in a body of water below as something falls into it and sinks out of sight.

### Chapter Six A FIGHT FOR LIFE

That "something" is not the car, however, but a rock dislodged when the car bumped it at the edge of the cliff. Allen and his men do not know that, and radio Krendon that Gentry is out of the way. Krendon accepts the information with a grain of salt: "I trust your

report on Gentry is true. Other reports of a similar nature have not been."

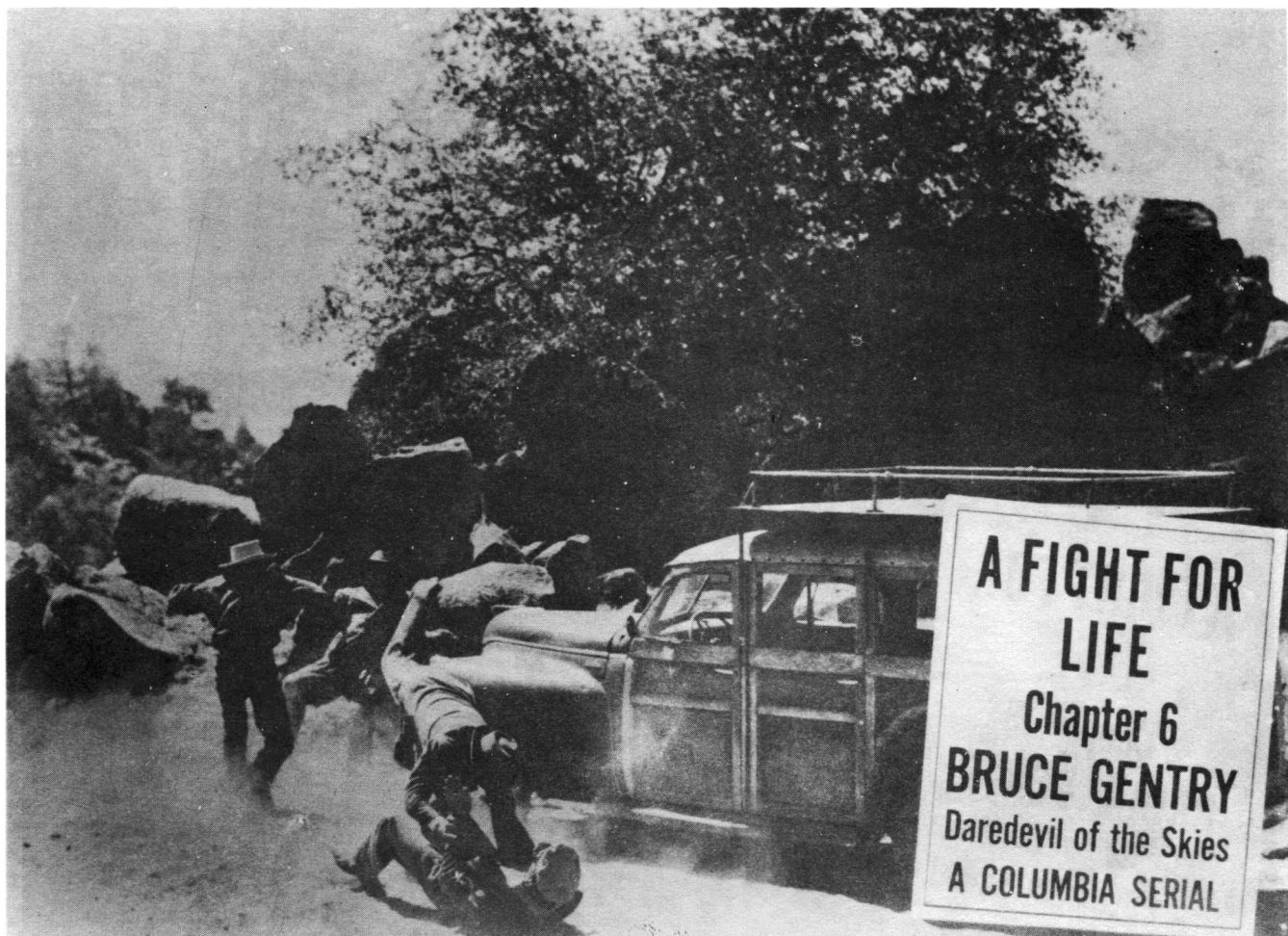
Frank, tied in the back of the truck with Ivor watching him, works free as the criminals drive off and tackles Ivor, knocking both of them off the truck and into the road. Bruce and Nita arrive just in time to help take Ivor into custody.

The Recorder knows, somehow, that Bruce is alive and Ivor has been captured. Krendon orders Allen and his men to try and nail Gentry and, next time they see him, Gentry is patrolling the ranch area on horseback. Allen tells the driver to go after him, adding that it will be a cinch to nail him. But he misses with every shot as Gentry rides over a hill and away.

"Pretty bad shooting," the driver grins. Allen responds by asking if the driver could hit anything moving that fast over a bumpy road like this one. "Yeah," says the driver. "Once I hit a truck."

Krendon goes to the ranch himself, impersonating a state police officer to try and spring Ivor. Ivor is freed but not for long, as





One of the action packed fight scenes is pictured on this Lobby Card. (Courtesy of Film Favorites.)

Bruce catches up with him and a furious fight (between their stunt doubles) ensues. Krendon tries to get a shot, and finally does. Bruce falls over a cliff.

#### **Chapter Seven THE FLYING DISC**

But Krendon's shot has winged Ivor, not Gentry. Bruce was knocked over the cliff by Ivor's last blow, and lands safely in water. Meanwhile, Krendon and company use knockout gas to slip into Radcliffe's quarters and recover the disc fragment Bruce had left there under guard as a trap for Krendon. Bruce and Radcliffe pursue the escaping car, but it goes up a ramp into the back of a truck and eludes them--but not with the real disc fragment. Bruce had substituted a fake.

Bruce and Radcliffe take their fragment to the cabin of an eccentric scientist who might be able to tell them something about it, but Allen and his men trace them there and lay siege to the place. Bruce and Radcliffe hold

them off with rifle fire, but Krendon launches a disc which swoops down and blows the cabin to smithereens.

#### **Chapter Eight FATE TAKES THE WHEEL**

"There's a flying disc headed straight for us," Radcliffe says. Bruce immediately raises a trapdoor in the middle of the cabin floor: "This may be a way out." And so it is.

They catch up with their attackers who are planting a bomb on their plane, but Bruce throws it out of range before it blows. The crooks use the diversion to escape by car, even though Radcliffe had a weapon and might have shot at them. "I'm scared to death of guns," Radcliffe explains.

Allen boldly approaches Nita at the ranch house, saying he and his companion were just passing by and he might be interested in buying the place. "Take a look around," he tells his companion.

"I'm sorry. I'm not interested in selling," Nita





Ralph Hodges and Tom Neal are featured on this Title Card. (Courtesy of Film Favorites.)

informs him.

"Take a look around anyway," the undaunted Allen tells his man. Nita's ranch hand, Joe, orders the men to leave at gunpoint but they jump him and knock him out. Nita makes it to her car and drives off, with Allen and his companion in pursuit.

Bruce and Frank, in Bruce's new plane supplied by Radcliffe, see what is happening. Bruce buzzes Allen's car, but the crooks coggedly keep after Nita. "There's only one way to settle this. Take the controls," he tells Frank. With Frank handling the craft, Bruce jumps from its cargo door into the crooks' convertible. He knocks one of them out of the car, but Allen proves tougher. Meanwhile, Frank's controls have somehow locked and he finds himself having to land. In what must be one of the most elaborate of all serial traps, the plane comes in for a landing on the road in one direction, and Bruce--knocked out by Allen, who then jumps from the car--is speeding toward it from the other. The plane and car crash into each other.

### Chapter Nine HAZARDOUS HEIGHTS

Bruce gets up, pulls himself from the car which is jammed against the plane, brushes himself off and checks Frank. Frank has been knocked out by the impact, which miraculously left Bruce unscathed. Allen and his companion flee rather than tangle with Gentry any further.

Forced to listen to another of The Recorder's messages, Benson is again ordered to produce the needed Element 99. Benson says his formula for processing it is at his home. Krendon wisely observes that Benson is probably hoping he will be rescued if they take him to his home to find the formula. "Yes," Benson admits quite candidly. Krendon decides to take the risk.

Hill (Stephen Carr), the Recorder's spy working in Radcliffe's office, is informed by telephone that Benson will be taken back to his home that night. Hill sees a chance to doublecross The Recorder as well, and enlists another of Radcliffe's men in a plan to "rescue" Benson and hold him themselves. Bruce has





A Title Card with Tom Neal. (Courtesy of Bill Cline.)

become suspicious by this time about how The Recorder seems to know all they know, and checks out Radcliffe's employees. He learns that Hill has supposedly left for a dental appointment but, on calling the number Hill wrote down, finds that Hill had not phoned a dentist before leaving.

"Hello, this is Hill speaking," Bruce says, disguising his voice.

"So what?" comes the reply. Bruce, thinking quickly, says he was simply checking back. "All you got to do is report on whether Benson's house is watched. Is it?" the man says. Bruce tells him it is not, and the other hangs up. So Bruce decides, naturally, to watch Benson's house.

Bruce and Radcliffe see Allen and his men with Benson, and get the drop on them. Benson reveals that the formula is really at his workshop, not his home, and he leaves with Bruce to get it while Radcliffe covers the captives. But the pair jump Radcliffe and escape, while Hill and his friend clobber Bruce from behind and take Benson to the workshop to recover the formula. Benson is understand-

ably confused by his round-robin rescue and recapture by three factions.

But when Hill arrives at the workshop, Bruce jumps in through a window and gets the drop on him. "How'd you get here ahead of us?" Hill demands.

"A faster car and a shorter route." But Allen and his men soon arrive, too. Bruce takes them on with some expert boxing, and one flashy maneuver where he runs up the side of a wall and leaps back at his attackers. But a thrown chair knocks him backwards through the window, and he falls toward the street below.

### Chapter Ten WATERS OF DOOM

Bruce plunges through an awning and onto a pile of books on display in front of a store. "Where'd you come from?" the astonished proprietor asks.

"Up there someplace," Bruce says, reaching for his wallet. "Here, this'll take care of the damage." But the real damage is that Allen and his men have escaped, with Benson and with





Charlie King and others have Tom Neal in their clutches on this Lobby Card. (Courtesy of Bill Cline.)

the formula for Element 99.

Radcliffe, who still seems to trust Hill up to a point, launches a search for Benson before he can be returned to wherever he was hidden. Hill and Radcliffe's men arrive at the airfield where Allen has Benson, and are fired upon. "That man's shooting at us," one of Radcliffe's guards (Dale Van Sickel) notes.

"Never mind him! Stop that plane!" Hill orders. The driver obeys, trying to keep it from taking off with Benson, but too late. Hill, seemingly astonished at seeing his orders carried out so well, chastises the driver for nearly wrecking them and ramming the plane.

But Bruce is in the air, too, and out-flies Allen's pilot, forcing them to land. "Let's put this coffin on the ground before we're all measured for the real thing," Allen says. Hill's men take them prisoner momentarily, but they manage to fight their way back onto the plane and take off again.

"Better call Gentry and tell him to get back on the job," a guard advises.

"Since when are you giving me orders?" Hill

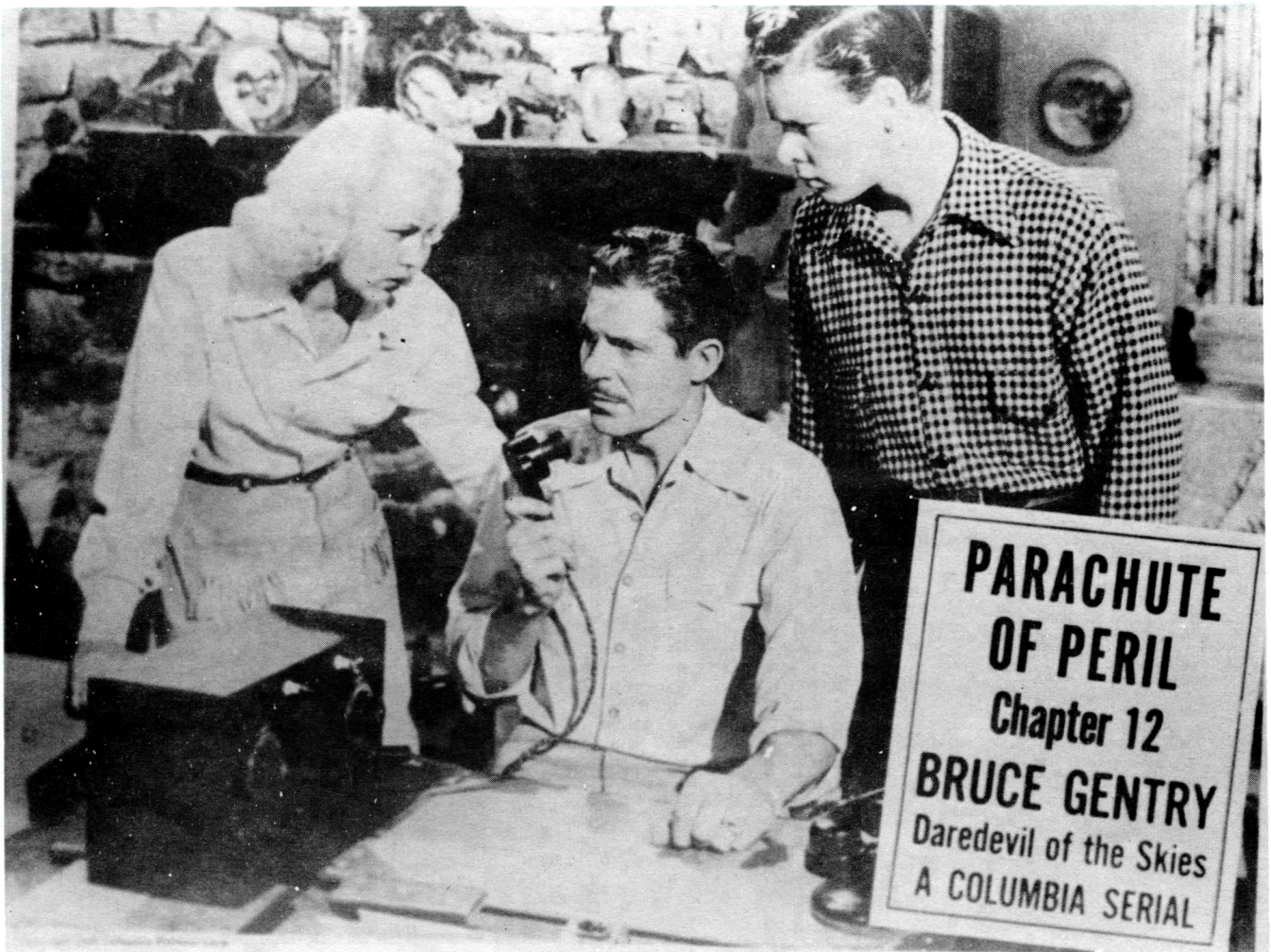
says. "Benson's safe. That's the main thing." He radios Radcliffe, saying Bruce told them to bring Benson to his office.

"Never mind what Gentry wanted," Radcliffe says, and tells his men to bring Benson to a shack of his in an isolated area instead. Hill obeys, but secretly radioes Krendon of its whereabouts. Bruce learns of it, too, from Radcliffe's secretary, and flies there. He offers to fly Benson back to the city and Radcliffe, while seemingly hesitant, gives in. On their way to the plane, however, Bruce, Radcliffe and Benson are jumped by Allen and his men. Allen knocks Bruce into some dammed-up water and, before Bruce comes around, opens a floodgate to sweep him away.

## Chapter Eleven GENTRY AT BAY

Bruce manages to grab a rope before the water sweeps him beyond the floodgate, and pulls himself out. The crooks have escaped, with Benson again their prisoner. But, Bruce





Judy Clark and Ralph Hodges listen as Tom Neal talks on the radio in the scene on this Lobby Card. (Courtesy of Film Favorites.)

tells Radcliffe, he still has Hill as a link that might lead somewhere.

"Our leader has recorded this message for Hill. It must be delivered to him in a roundabout way," Krendon instructs one of his men. The roundabout way is to leave it in Hill's glove compartment at the Pyramid Parking Lot, but Radcliffe's secretary intercepts the message about where it is and Bruce gets it first. He listens to the recording, which orders Hill to pick up a crate at a dock and report to Allen at an airfield, and deletes the first part of the tape figuring to track Hill to the field. Bruce picks up the crate himself after replacing the tape, but more helpful is following Hill to Allen. He manages to hide inside their plane before Allen and Chandler take off for their other field.

The field is located on Nita's ranch and, in one of those not-so-rare serial coincidences, Nita happens onto it at this time and is captured by Ivor and Hurst. Meanwhile, Bruce is discovered hiding on the approaching plane and knocked out in a fight.

When the four hoods drag him off, he sees Nita tied to a pole at one end of the runway. The sight seems to give him renewed strength because he shakes off his captors and beats up on all four. However, the still-running airplane's controls are jarred and it begins to drift down the runway toward Nita, one of its two propellers about to cut her to ribbons.

## Chapter Twelve PARACHUTE OF PERIL

Bruce, having dispatched all four of his opponents, sprints down the runway and grabs the end of one of the drifting plane's wings. His weight is enough to turn it and save Nita. While he unties her, the plane is now drifting in the opposite direction along the runway toward where the knocked-out quartet is coming around. Their attempts to avoid the plane, duplicate Bruce's grab of one wing and otherwise control the situation leaves them running all over the place, yelling things like "Catch that plane!"





CRASH IN MID-AIR!

# PARACHUTE OF PERIL

Chapter 12

**BRUCE GENTRY**

Daredevil of the Skies

Based upon the famous Newspaper Feature,  
"Bruce Gentry"

with  
**TOM NEAL**  
as Bruce Gentry

Judy Clark · Ralph Hodges · Forrest Taylor

Written for the Screen by George H. Plympton,  
Joseph H. Poland and Lewis Clay

Directed by SPENCER BENNET and THOMAS CARR

Produced by SAM KATZMAN · A COLUMBIA SERIAL

Terry Frost, Forrest Taylor and Tom Neal in another scene on a Lobby Card. (Courtesy of Film Favorites.)

Nita and Bruce slip away, with Allen in pursuit. Hiding, Bruce heaves a couple of boulders into a river. Allen hears the splashes and assumes Bruce and the girl dived in. He fires some slugs after them and, when they fail to surface, assumes they are hit or drowned.

Frank shows up on horseback and connects with Bruce and Nita. Bruce tells him to take Nita to the ranch and return by car to pick him up at the edge of the airfield. "When you come to a guy thumbing a ride, that'll be me."

He sneaks back to the airfield building, catches Allen alone and knocks him out. He has little time to search it, however, because Chandler and the others are approaching it. Bruce casually turns a chair around and stands calmly beside it to greet them when they enter. Then he snatches up the chair, clobbers one of them and knocks the others down before running to where Frank has brought the station wagon, with Chandler and the others not quick enough to catch him.

"What'll we do now?" one of the henchmen asks, as Bruce and Frank speed away in the

station wagon.

"Well, unless you've got a jet motor to strap on, we're walking back," Chandler replies.

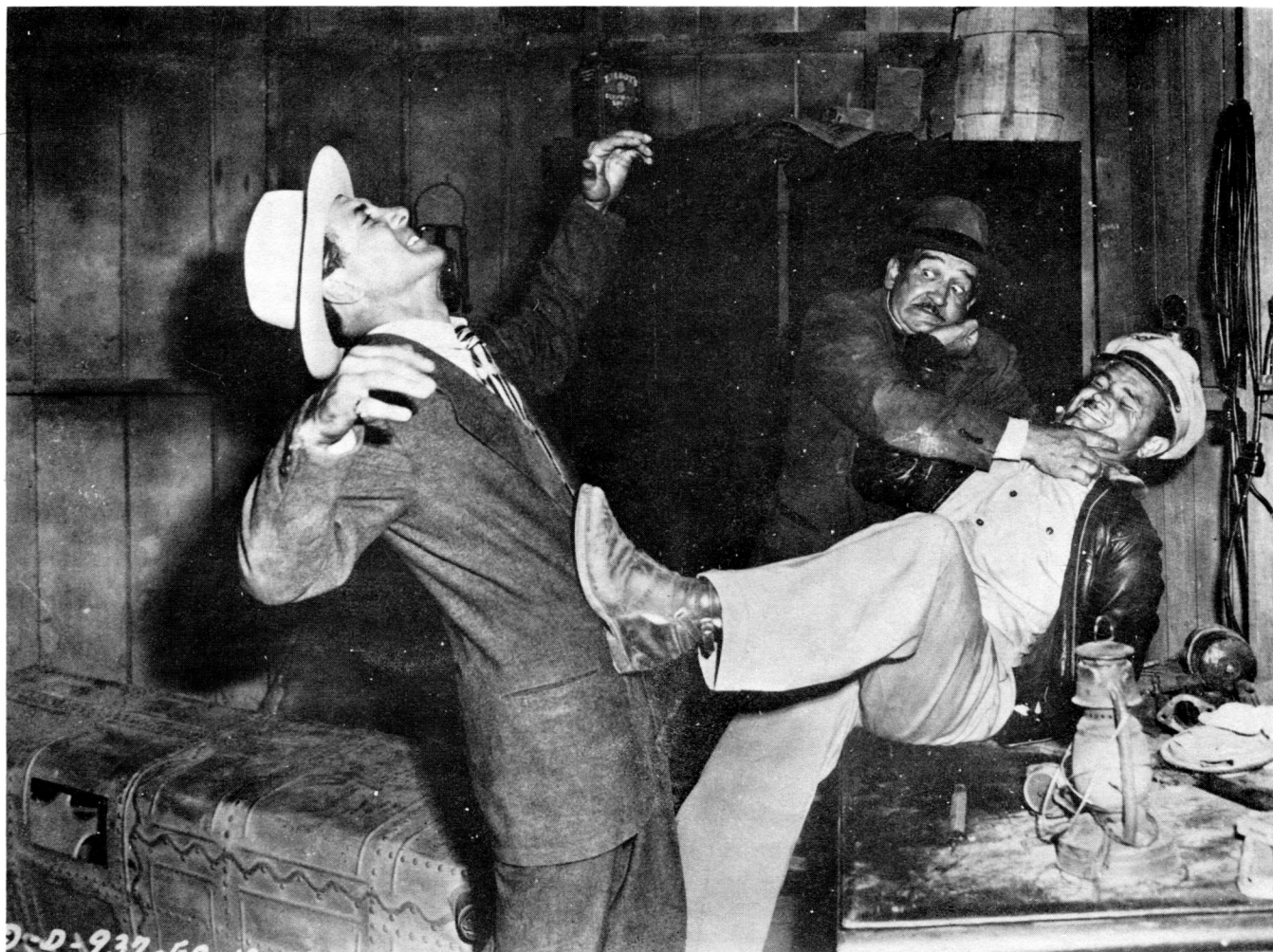
Hill, meanwhile, has been locked up at the ranch since nobody trusts him anymore—but The Recorder is afraid he will talk and sets a group of men to free him. They jump Joe, the ranch hand, and make off with Hill. But it is a setup, as becomes obvious when Bruce and his friends help Joe up and Bruce says, "Good work, Joe."

"Thanks. I ought to be a Hollywood stuntman," Joe says. (Probably he was.)

Bruce takes to the air to follow Hill, hoping to locate The Recorder's hideaway. But the men in the car spot the plane and radio Krendon, who warms up the flashing and sparking equipment and launches a disc. The tell-tale overheating of his plane's control warns Bruce quickly enough for him to bail out, but his parachute brings him down at the top of a cliff, hanging there and leaving him dangling over the side by its ropes.

Bruce starts to climb up, when one of the





Charles King and Tom Neal are both making faces in this scene from Chapter Twelve of **BRUCE GENTRY** (1949, Columbia). (Courtesy of Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store.)

ropes snaps, cut by the sharp rocks where the top of the parachute is caught. Then another snaps, and another, until the dangling Bruce looks like he is surrounded by spaghetti. As he tries again to climb up, the last rope snaps.

### Chapter Thirteen MENACE OF THE MESA

Bruce falls, but one chute line catches on a rock part-way down and holds until he can secure himself again. He climbs back up and hides, as a plane-load of The Recorder's men arrives to locate him. They find the remnants of his chute and conclude that he plunged to his death.

"Did you see his body?" demands Krendon, who has learned to be skeptical about reports of Gentry's death.

"No, but we saw his parachute."

"That's not good enough! I want definite proof." He sends his three men back to recheck.

Meantime, Frank and Nita wait with Radcliffe

to hear from Bruce. Frank recounts Benson's original kidnapping (from Chapter One, covering Bruce's initial fight with The Recorder's men and his futile pursuit of them first by car and then mini-bike; it is as close as this serial comes to having a review chapter) to Radcliffe and, suddenly, they do get a radio call from Bruce. He has circled back to the plane which brought Allen and his men to search for him, and is using its radio to direct Frank to fly over the mesa and drop off his motorized mini-bike.

Allen spots Bruce and takes a shot at him. He and the other two try to force Bruce to the edge of the mesa. Bruce jumps from a rock onto Hurst and Chandler and knocks them out, but is driven off again by Allen. By now, Frank is flying over and drops the mini-bike by chute. Bruce frees it, gets it started and hops aboard as the three confused ruffians run in all directions trying to catch him. But his ride is a short one. Bruce seems to drive the machine right off the cliff's edge.





Tris Coffin using the radio to give instructions again on this Lobby Card. (Courtesy of Bill Cline.)

#### Chapter Fourteen BRUCE'S STRATEGY

But he has grabbed a mini-chute off his mini-bike and, as it crashes below, Bruce floats down safely. (The sequence is done by cartoon animation, like the discs; no doubt the Lydecker brothers at Republic would have found a better way.) One of his pursuers, not having seen the chute, wonders aloud if Gentry has gone crazy. "Well, whatever happened, we're rid of him," Allen says--incorrectly as usual.

"Don't you think we better check to make sure?" asks Chandler. Allen invites him to "go take a running jump" and do it.

Bruce makes it back to the ranch, and makes plans for an expedition to go to the mesa and locate The Recorder's hideout. The Recorder, meanwhile, is giving orders on a tape to prepare to hit the Panama Canal and to kill the treacherous Hill, who nobody trusts by now. Radcliffe, alone in the ranch's radio room momentarily, calls Krendon and offers to put Gentry into a position where he can be captured on the mesa for an hour's

conversation with Benson. Krendon, although he seems suspicious, agrees.

Most of The Recorder's men doubt Bruce's ability to land a plane on the mesa, but Bruce brings it in on the north rim. He and Radcliffe, Frank and Nita begin their search. Radcliffe says he will circle the ridge and fire a warning shot if anyone is sneaking up on the party. The rest proceed into what turns out to be a blind canyon, tracked all the while by The Recorder's men carrying radios. Radcliffe is taken prisoner, despite his protests that Krendon was to let him talk to Benson, and a trap is about to be sprung on the others in the canyon.

But Hill, who has overheard the others planning to get rid of him, warns Bruce and the others in time for them to take cover. Unfortunately for Hill, he is shot down before he can make it behind the rocks himself.

"I insist on seeing Krendon," Radcliffe informs Allen when he is brought before him.

"Am I arguing?" Allen details Hurst to take Radcliffe to their headquarters and, with Chandler and Gregg (Eddie Parker), continues firing at Bruce and his friends. They fire with





Tom Neal unmasks Forrest Taylor as the mysterious recorder in this scene from **BRUCE GENTRY** (1949, Columbia). (Courtesy of Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store.)

such enthusiasm that they are soon out of ammunition.

"I'm out of shells. Gimme some," says Allen.

"I've been out," a disgusted Chandler replies.

"How about you?" Allen asks Gregg. In reply, Gregg reaches under his coat and pulls out a knife.

So the terrible trio closes in, and manages to grab off Frank and Nita. Gregg stalks Bruce and, with his knife upraised, jumps him and brings him to the ground.

### **Last Chapter THE FINAL DISC**

But his knife-swing misses, and Bruce knocks him out. Bruce then catches up with Radcliffe and Hurst, in time to see Radcliffe jump the other man but end up losing the fight. Bruce joins in and Hurst falls over a cliff to his death.

The conversation between Bruce and Radcliffe then reveals that Radcliffe's radio call to Krendon had been part of their plan all along,

so Bruce would be able to land the party without getting zapped by a disc. The two continue to The Recorder's lair, where they surprise Allen and Chandler, knock them out and tie them up.

They invade The Recorder's lair, catch Krendon and an assistant, and free Frank and Nita. Bruce enters the adjoining room where Dr. Benson has been held prisoner, and encounters a hooded man--The Recorder. They struggle, Bruce rips off the mask, and reveals--Dr. Benson!

Benson? The Recorder? Before it can all be figured out, Benson switches on some gas that drives Bruce back as he exits from a rear door. Bruce goes after him.

Krendon, who has been tied up, works free and sneaks a pistol from a convenient drawer. He locks Radcliffe, Nita and Frank in Benson's old room, and proceeds with his assistant to launch the disc against the Panama Canal. He communicates by radio with Benson, who has reached a plane and is about to take off, and Benson gives him the go-ahead.





Another look at the unmasking scene with Tom Neal and Forrest Taylor on a Lobby Card. (Courtesy of Bill Cline. Bill's book **In the Nick of Time** on the serials has found a publisher and should be out soon.)

Bruce arrives and struggles with Benson over Benson's pistol which goes off--killing Benson. Bruce takes off in the plane, just as Krendon launches the disc. Krendon's assistant tries to tell him conditions are still not right, they must wait until an overload cools down, and even struggles physically with him to delay the launching, but Krendon is determined. "We'll wait for nothing," he declares, and throws the switch--which blows up the launching room along with Krendon and the assistant.

But the disc has been launched. Once again, smoke comes from the overheated controls of Bruce's plane and Bruce bails out. The disc blows up his plane instead of hitting the Canal Zone, ending the threat of the final disc.

Newspaper headlines credit Bruce with averting the threat of the flying discs against the western world, while Bruce and his friends try to figure out how Benson could have been The Recorder. Bruce concludes that the kidnapping was staged because "he was doing work for the government, and that meant that

he was more or less being watched." Even Krendon's henchmen did not know the truth, when they were questioned afterward. "He and Krendon must've put on quite an act," Bruce concludes.

Before the celebration goes much farther, Bruce receives a phone call from Washington--and the next thing you know, he is leaving on a new assignment and saying goodbye to his friends from this one.

-PD

**THE END**

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# JOHN ENGLISH:

## *A Happy Accident Made Him a Serial Director*

by Gene Fernet you aren't likely to believe me, but what the h---, I'll tell it anyway!"

John English, whom I met in 1967, was a remarkable man, delightful, a true raconteur, I quickly discovered over cocktails at the venerable Masquers Club in Hollywood.

Many serious devotees of American film history remember John as one of the most successful action film directors Republic had. Often paired with another similar director William Witney, English turned out such slambang action serials as Republic's **ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN MARVEL**, **DICK TRACY VS. CRIME INC.**, **JUNGLE GIRL**, and **KING OF THE TEXAS RANGERS** (all 1941). He later directed Gene Autry in a group of Westerns which were released through Columbia, as well.

It was too early for lunch when John called for me at the Hollywood Roosevelt; consequently we hied ourselves to the Masquers Club basement bar, chatting with the likes of Jack Mulhall (who was just then recuperating from a serious heart attack) while I, in the meantime, was downing more bourbon-and-gingers than was my usual wont.

"Where were you born, John?" I managed to insert.

"I'm English, as my name suggests. I was born in Suffolk, England," John returned.

"Your name didn't seem to show up in directorial credits until the late 1930s," I said. "Surely you didn't just suddenly become a film director..."

"Nothing that simple," English replied. "I started my Hollywood career as a film cutter employed by producer Maurice Conn, who was at that time fronting a poverty row outfit called Ambassador Pictures. It was there that I got my early chances to be a film director."

We ordered another round, and soon the effects of the drinks had turned John English into a more animated and entertaining speaker than before. He smoothed a corner of his small, carefully trimmed moustache and enthusiastically continued the narrative.

"One of the Ambassador productions was a terribly under-budgeted western which Conn elected to shoot up in Utah. That silly picture changed my whole darned life." English waited until the effect of his words had registered in the expression on my face, at which point John chuckled. "If I try to tell you this whole story,

English smiled, for he sensed that I was an intent, interested listener. "We had set up a shot inside an actual rural store, ready to do a scene in which one of our players, portraying the storekeeper was to be the victim of a couple of holdup men. Okay? That was simple enough, you'd think, anyway! Only what happened next was one of those things that make a film director tear his hair--when he's lucky enough to have any!"

"We got ready for the shot. You know the bit: camera, lights, sound equipment---the whole works. Then an assistant ran in and told me that the two guys who were to commit the dastardly robbery were loaded, drunk out of their skulls! I couldn't use them. Never in the world," continued English.

I groaned, in empathy for my friend and the quandary in which he had found himself that day in Utah.

"When your budget is as small as the one I had for that picture--and time is so short--you just look at the script and try to figure a way around the difficulties. That's what I did, you see. I suddenly made the camera a subjective object in the picture, that is I made the audience 'see' through the eye of the camera precisely what the bandits would have seen while they committed the robbery.

"The storekeeper is shown, turning around to face the camera as if the camera is a robber, holding up the place. Frightened, the storekeeper raises his trembling arms. A hand reaches out before the lens, scoops up the cash from the cash-drawer, and the camera begins to slowly 'back away' from our frightened storekeeper, his arms still upraised."

English chuckled. "It was an exigency. That's all it was. I wasn't **trying** to be original, or anything of that sort. How was I to know that Republic officials would happen to view that particular picture of mine and, wanting to hire a new director, would get excited enough at that particular treatment of a scene to offer me a contract?"

I was more than a trifle amused! "And that was what landed you at Republic, then," I interjected.

"That was how I got out of Ambassador-Conn and into Republic and all those chapter plays,





At Republic studios offices, action directors William Witney and John English examine one of the futuristic type weapons used in their serials. The other gentleman is probably a producer, maybe Hiram Brown. (Courtesy of Francis M. Nevins, Jr.)

westerns, and so on."

"Those pictures included, as I recall, a feature which starred boss Herbert J. Yates girl friend--who became his--Vera Ralston, am I right?", I prompted.

John nodded. "The only one of her pictures which ever made money, save for those she played in where John Wayne was the star. Yes, the picture I directed Vera Ralston in was a top-budget feature called **MURDER IN THE MUSIC HALL**.

English hesitated before continuing, as if perhaps it might be well not to tell me the behind-the-scenes events which transpired. Then, apparently deciding to tell all, he went on. "I damned near got into a quarrel with Yates over the budget for that picture."

"How so?" I asked.

"Well, when I got my hands on the advance budget figures for the picture, there was a very high figure listed under 'miscellaneous', so I went to the accounting office and asked for an explanation. They told me if I wanted to know

what that money represented, I'd have to find out from Yates himself!" John finished his drink, and we headed for the dining room.

"Did you ever find out what that budget figure represented?" I asked John, as we looked over the menu.

"Damn right I did," he replied. "I asked Yates himself! He hemmed and hawed around and obviously wasn't going to tell me, until it was that I got angry. I told him I didn't want anything charged against a picture I was responsible for unless I knew what the sum represented. 'If you're charging a bunch of lousy scripts for Vera Ralston pictures that were never made, or something of that sort, it won't be tacked onto a show I direct!'"

"Wow!" I commented, "And what did Mr. Yates answer to that?"

"He struck off the 'miscellaneous' charge from my picture, leaving only those things which I could see were legitimate costs of my film. I then went ahead with the film, brought it in on time, and within the allotted budget. It



was a nice little film in spite of Vera Ralston who as you know wasn't a good actress by any stretch of imagination!"

We ordered lunch then, and while we were waiting for the meal to arrive, our conversation drifted to the drinking habits of many Hollywood figures, a few of whom we saw there at Masquers Club that day.

"You directed a lot of Gene Autry's Columbia picture offerings," I began. "Wasn't he inclined to tip the glass a bit too often? It seems I read that Autry got so drunk at a rodeo or similar personal appearance that reportedly he fell off his horse!"

John nodded. "Autry never was much of a rider, you know, and so whenever those old eyes of his were bloodshot when he strode onto the set, I simply cancelled all shots which called for Autry to do any sort of difficult riding.

"One day, however, he fooled me. He was in bad shape when he came on the set. First takes that morning called for him to be caught in the middle of a stampede of cattle! I tried to keep the cattle in **back** of Autry while we filmed. But no, somehow those damned cattle came in all around Autry and his horse!

"Darned if Gene didn't manage to ride safely out of that mess--right as I was visualizing headlines telling of his death in a cattle stampede while filming a picture, and so forth..."

The meal arrived just as John was warming up to the telling of a delightful account of how, when he directed Ralph Byrd and Dave Sharpe in **DICK TRACY RETURNS**, the 15 episode serial made by Republic in 1938. John abbreviated the story, saying only that he found both Byrd and Sharpe to be "fine, fine gentlemen," and Dave Sharpe to be, in addition, a surprisingly great stuntman who could make a scene such as his appearing to be losing consciousness while standing on a truck tail-gate and falling off the vehicle look positively frightening!

Once the meal was out of the way, our conversation drifted to things closer to the present: "What did you do for employment after Republic folded?" I asked.

"Mostly directorial stints on segments of TV series," John answered as if not so interested in his more recent work. He shrugged. "You know, things like a few segments of the **PERRY MASON** show."

John spoke enthusiastically of his dream for doing a sort of documentary film on Squaw Valley, California, which the Disney organization was then contemplating turning into a ski resort.

At that point, English glanced at his watch,

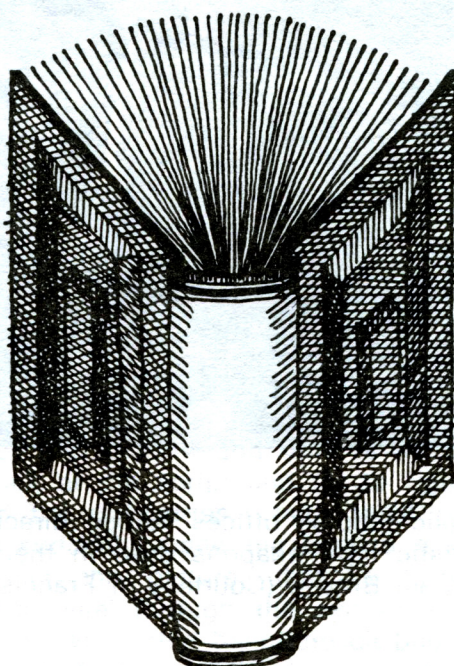
and announced we'd have to call a halt at this point. "Not that I don't enjoy chatting about the old days," he said. "In fact, let's get together again, very soon, okay?"

I nodded, and promised to see him again some day soon. Unfortunately, that tentative date never rolled around. John passed away, reminding me sadly how his exciting story would never be told in its entirety.

We film lovers are the losers, I am certain.

-GF

## CLIFFHANGER Looks at Books



**THE VANISHING LEGION: A HISTORY OF MASCOT PICTURES 1927-1935** by Jon Tuska. 215 pp. McFarland, Jefferson, NC, 1982. \$17.95. Reviewed by Michael R. Pitts.

As author Jon Tuska tells us in both the acknowledgements and the preface for this book, the volume is an expansion of a series of articles he wrote on Mascot Pictures for his **View & Reviews** magazine several years ago. The book, in fact, is dedicated to the readers and contributors to that defunct publication and Tuska says in the book's preface that the many letters he received from readers on his serialized Mascot articles were interpolated in this volume's text. "No book should purport to be more than it is," Tuska writes and apparently he followed this criteria when writing **The Vanishing Legion** because he makes no effort to immortalize his subject matter, only to matter-of-factly report on it and evaluate it in the terms of the times when these pictures



were produced.

For the most part **The Vanishing Legion** is fascinating reading. The author has done his homework well and has not only obviously seen what he is writing about but also he sought out and interviewed many of the people on both sides of the camera which made the Mascot product possible. For example, while much has been written about Nat Levine, little has been heard from this man but Tuska talked with him on more than one occasion and obviously much of the inside information about Mascot Pictures included here must have come from the studio's owner. The same is true for the many asides, both credited and otherwise, which appear regarding the various Mascot productions.

If the book has any one single drawback it is perhaps Tuska's continuing quotations from various works of psychology to cement his own opinions of the motivations used in the films themselves. Taking a look at Mascot Pictures from a psychological viewpoint is perhaps akin to asking the age old question, "Why?"--the most logical answer being "Why Not?". This apart, **The Vanishing Legion** is delightful reading for those of us who love Hollywood's history especially history of the more obscure variety. Also there are fascinating comments on such people as Ken Maynard, Tom Mix, Harry Carey, Yakima Canutt, Edwina Booth, Gene Autry (who Tuska treats much too harshly) and Lucille Browne, just to name a few. Two fine picture sections and a thorough index of Mascot features and serials also compliment the volume.

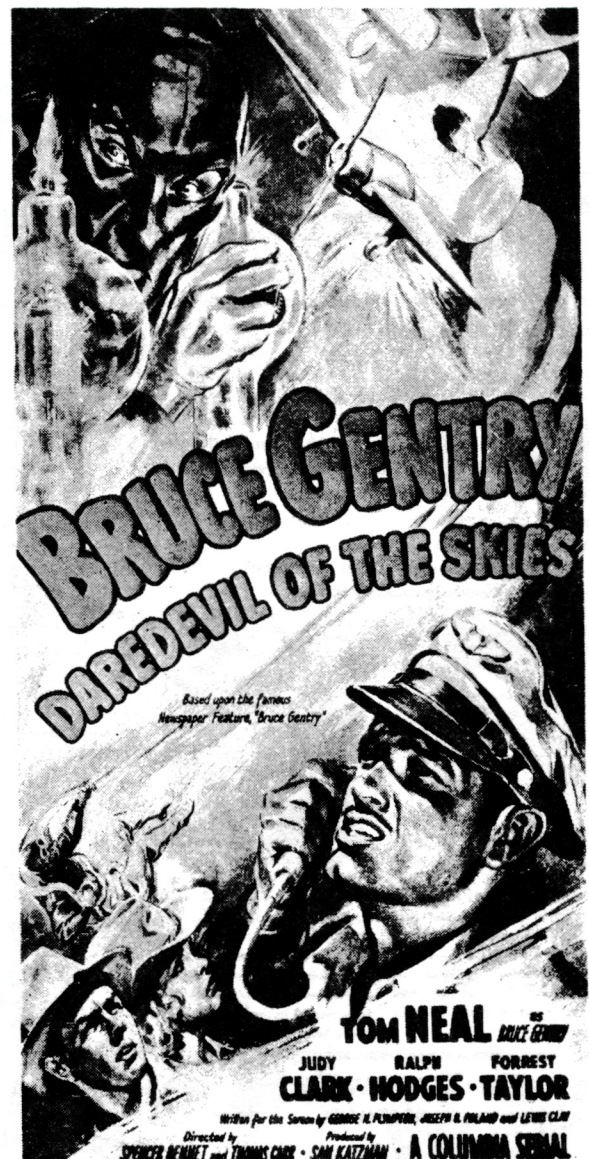
**The Vanishing Legion** is not the first work on Mascot studios being preceded by several magazine pieces and coverage of the firm in a number of books dealing with various film genres. Also there was a book on Mascot, **Next Time Drive Off the Cliff!** by Gene Fernet (Cinememories, 1968), a large volume which was nice on visuals but skimpy on text. Before this outing by Tuska, probably the best coverage of Mascot was by the late Don Miller in his excellent **B Movies** (Curtis Books, 1973) although, naturally, it was not as indepth as Tuska's book because it was not intended to cover just Mascot, but all the independents, as well as the majors, who made second bill features in the 1930s and most of the 1940s.

Taking a look at Mascot films today, both features and serials, one can readily ascertain they were something special. Audiences of their day also probably noticed that Nat Levine's product was different from the run-of-the-mill "B" fodder being fed to theatres of the period, both in entertainment value and plot structure. After all, as Tuska brings out in **The Vanishing**

**Legion**, it was Nat Levine who popularized triad heroes on film as well as making the most actionful serials of the sound era. Of course these formulas, mostly under his direction, would reach near perfection when Mascot merged with several small studios under the leadership of Herbert J. Yates to form Republic Pictures.

Like the Mascot films themselves, **The Vanishing Legion** will become a special book for those readers who have come under the spell of Nat Levine's productions. Jon Tuska has done quite a good job in compiling the history of this fascinating little studio, and the craftsmen who worked there, and hopefully this study will encourage book research into more of the poverty row outfits of the 1930s and 1940s.

-MRP







**HENRY BRANDON**  
(as Fu Manchu)

This fine character actor has been in close to 100 motion pictures and four serials. Some of his credits include: *Babes in Toyland*, *Drums of Fu Manchu*, the *Buster Crabbe Buck Rogers* serial, *Marshal of Mesa City* and *The Searchers*.

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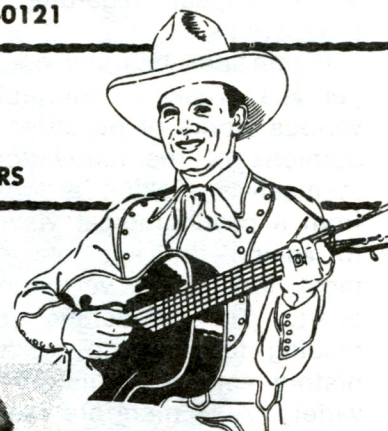
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**JOHN RUSSELL**

The granite jawed marshal Dan Troop on TV's *Lawman* series. He has also had strong roles in *Yellow Sky*, *Rio Bravo*, *Fighting Coast Guard* and *The Sun Shines Bright*, rated one of John Ford's best films. Mr. Russell wants his fans to know he plans to attend our festival pending his availability.

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